DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 420 411 PS 026 580

| | |
|---|---|
| TITLE | Rwanda's Women and Children: The Long Road to Reconciliation. A Field Report Assessing the Protection and Assistance Needs of Rwandan Women and Children. |
| INSTITUTION | Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, New York, NY. |
| PUB DATE | 1997-12-00 |
| NOTE | 40p. |
| PUB TYPE | Reports - Research (143) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC02 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Adolescents; Child Welfare; *Childhood Needs; Children; Civil Liberties; *Educational Needs; *Females; Financial Needs; Financial Support; Foreign Countries; Homeless People; *Housing Needs; International Programs; *Refugees; Technical Assistance; Violence |
| IDENTIFIERS | Child Protection; Orphans; Reintegration; *Rwanda; United Nations |

ABSTRACT

Rwanda faces tremendous challenges as it tries to fight off insurgents, rebuild its infrastructure, reintegrate refugees, and assist genocide survivors. This report details an investigation which assessed the protection and assistance needs of Rwandan women and children. Part 1 of the report contains the executive summary, key findings, and the study's objectives. Part 2 details the needs of women survivors and returnees for protection, shelter, economic assistance, and health care; describes key programs; and discusses reintegration issues. Part 3 presents children's needs, focusing on separated and orphaned children, issues surrounding residential care, reintegration strategies, children-headed households, street children, girls, and educational needs. The findings of this investigation indicate that significant United Nations funds have been earmarked for women's programs; however, many programs face obstacles related to capacity, resources, and skills. There continues to be a need for better protection programs, human rights monitoring, training in project planning and management, comprehensive reproductive health services, and programs to address violence against women and girls. Donors should study the impact of assistance to ensure that it does not aggravate ethnic tensions rather than alleviate them. Thousands of separated and orphaned children live in centers, on the streets, in children-headed households, and in prisons. Efforts are needed to help children find homes and secure their future. A comprehensive plan of action is needed to transform centers into community service centers. The report concludes with recommendations regarding Rwanda's women returnees and survivors and the separated and orphaned children. (Author/KB)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

# Rwanda's Women and Children: The Long Road to Reconciliation

ED 426 411

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

□ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Diana Quick

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

A field report assessing the protection and assistance needs of Rwandan women and children

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

PS 026 480

2

## Mission Statement

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children seeks to improve the lives of refugee women and children through a vigorous program of public education and advocacy, and by acting as a technical resource. The Commission, founded in 1989 under the auspices of the International Rescue Committee, is the only organization in the United States dedicated solely to speaking out on behalf of women and children uprooted by armed conflict or persecution.

As part of an ongoing project to look into the protection of women and children in refugee settings around the world, the Commission sent a delegation to Rwanda in September 1997 to investigate the conditions for survivor and returnee women, children and adolescents.

*The Women's Commission would like to thank the Ford Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation without whose support this project would not have been possible.*

Copyright © December 1997 by Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.
All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America.

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children
122 East 42nd Street, 12th Floor
New York, NY 10168-1289
Tel: 212.551.3111, Fax: 212.551.3180, E-mail: wcrwc@intrescom.org
Web site: http://media.hypernet.com/wcrwc.html

Cover: Rwandan refugee woman is reunited with her child ©Marie de la Soudiere

# TABLE OF CONTENTS


Executive Summary ..... 2
Key Findings ..... 3
Delegation Objectives ..... 5
Rwanda: The Refugee Experience ..... 5
Women Survivors and Returnees ..... 5
- Overview ..... 5
- Legal and Social Status ..... 6
- Protection ..... 7
- Shelter ..... 8
- Economic Status ..... 9
- General and Reproductive Health ..... 10

Key Programs for Women ..... 10
- Women in Transition ..... 10
- The Rwandan Women's Initiative ..... 11
- UNDP and UNIFEM Initiative ..... 14

Reintegration Issues ..... 14
- Caring for Prisoners ..... 15
- Reconciliation ..... 15
- Women's Associations Support Vulnerable Children ..... 16

Children ..... 18
- Overview ..... 18

Children Living in Centers ..... 19
- Understanding the Issues Surrounding Residential Care ..... 19
- National Responses to Children's Centers ..... 20
- Major Concerns on Finding Durable Solutions ..... 21
- Overview of Strategies ..... 22
- Children in Need of Tracing ..... 22
- "Inconnus" ..... 23
- Hard-to-place Children ..... 24
- Other Major Points to Consider ..... 24

Children-Headed Households ..... 26
Children in Spontaneous Foster Care ..... 27
Street Children ..... 27
- Street Girls ..... 28
- Adolescents ..... 28

Education as a Priority ..... 29
Conclusion ..... 30
Recommendations ..... 31
Members of the Delegation ..... 34
Acknowledgements ..... 34
Acronyms ..... 35
Organizations With Which the Delegation Met ..... 35
Endnotes ..... 36

# Executive Summary

The road to reconciliation for Rwandans is long and rocky as they try to rebuild their lives after a genocide that claimed more than 800,000 lives, a massive refugee exodus and now the return of those refugees. Women and children were targets during these disasters and continue to be targets in a brutal war that pits ethnic group against ethnic group. The United Nations and international donors provided approximately $3 billion of aid to Rwanda in 1997; some $60 million over two years is going directly to programs for women and children. These funds are helping widows build shelters and separated children find their families. But there is a lack of coordination in the way funds are spent at a time when coordinated efforts are critical. For example, donors poured money into shelter building with little planning and now new houses stand empty. Meanwhile, there is a tremendous need for education programs and health care services for women, children and adolescents, but little is being spent on these "human development" projects.

Refugee women returning to their villages in Rwanda from the camps feel bitterness and confusion; they are extremely poor, with little access to assistance. In some cases their husbands are in jail, accused of genocide. In others, their husbands have left to continue the war.

On the other side, there are the genocide survivors, who feel anger and fear. They do not want to discuss reconciliation after having had their families murdered and lost their networks of friends and relatives. Yet they now are forced to live beside some of the people who perpetrated the genocide.

Traditionally considered second-class citizens, women have opportunities to become a powerful force for change in Rwanda. Survivors of genocide have formed women's organizations—called associations—which are constructing houses, earning income together, learning to read and write, and providing each other with moral support. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are working towards improving the lives of Rwanda's women by providing legal advice, advocating for women's rights and bringing public awareness to the special problems facing women. There is also a small, but dynamic group of women leaders working within the Parliament and Government ministries to change laws and practices which discriminate against women.

Of the 1.2 million refugees who returned to Rwanda in 1997, many were women who had been forced to stay in the camps in then-Zaire, where they were sexually exploited; some returned alone to their villages pregnant or with babies. Others shoulder the burden of having to support husbands, sons and relatives who have been imprisoned. They live under a cloud of suspicion and mistrust and are often marginalized. Little monitoring takes place for recently returned refugees and it appears that few services are directed towards them.

The violence of the region has taken a terrible toll on children. UNICEF estimates that during the genocide 300,000 children were murdered. Those who survived witnessed first-hand the murder of families and neighbors by trusted and respected adults. Children in exile also were targeted and continue to be.

One legacy of the war in the Great Lakes region of Africa is the hundreds of thousands of separated and orphaned children. The Government of Rwanda reported in 1994 that there were approximately 400,000 separated and orphaned children in country. International agencies registered more than 11,000 children without parents during the massive repatriation alone. Thousands of these children still live in centers (commonly known as orphanages), on the streets, in children-headed households and in prisons.

Although much has been done to assist vulnerable children in Rwanda, much more can be done to help children find homes and secure their future. In the total NGO budget, approximately 15.6 percent of all assistance has been specifically earmarked to help separated and orphaned children. Elaborate tracing and family reunification programs are being implemented, but not enough work is being done to find homes for "hard-to-place" and "hard-to-trace" children. Thousands of children have been living in centers for several years; some because they are orphans, others for reasons linked to extreme poverty. The Government, working in collaboration with international donors, should seek real solutions for these children. A comprehensive plan of action needs to be immediately implemented and initiatives to transform centers into community service centers, which can offer valuable programs, such as literacy and vocational training for adolescents, should be promoted and supported.

Another major concern is five essentially "invisible" groups of children who are in need of more attention and support: girl children; children living in spontaneous foster care situations; children-headed house-

holds; adolescents; and returnee children living in insecure regions of the country. These children face a myriad of problems, some which are known and some which need more study.

Reintegration is a long-term process which requires a long-term commitment by both the Government of Rwanda and the international community. Separated and orphaned children are not a thirty-day phenomena, nor are the problems facing Rwanda's women. The urgency to respond remains. Moreover, there is a need for vision and leadership on how best to use the resources available.

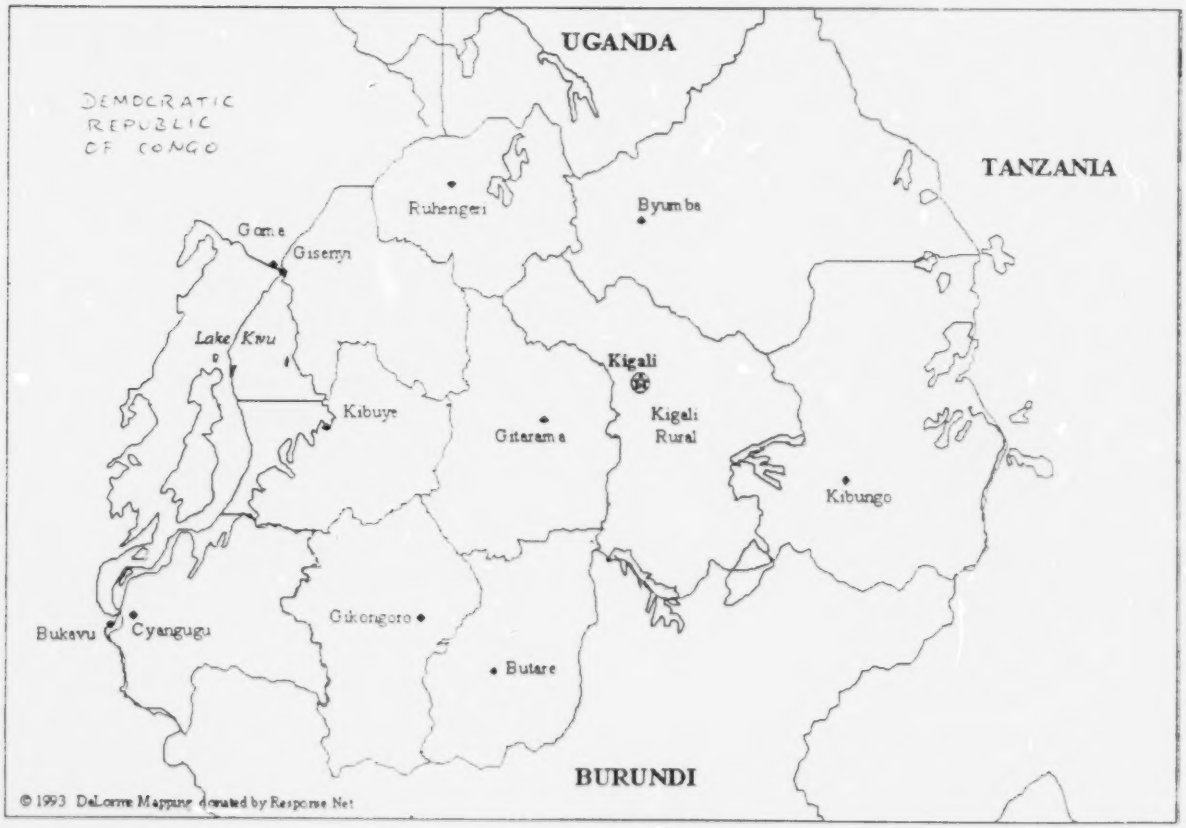
# Key Findings

## Women

In an unusual and welcome move, the United Nations has earmarked funds for women's programs, including approximately $7 million for UNHCR's Rwandan Women's Initiative and $4 million for UNDP's Trust Fund for Women. Women's programs are usually the last thing funded in refugee and repatriation situations.

These funds came about in response to media reports on the rape, abuse and violence perpetrated against Rwandan women and pressure from advocacy groups. It is imperative that the UN and donors continue to support these efforts over the long run, as the majority of Rwanda's population is female, and women are responsible for providing care for the thousands of separated and orphaned children and for other community building activities.

## RWANDAN PREFECTURES



To ensure long-term continuity, UNDP and UNHCR should work together to identify programming priorities so that those programs now receiving funds from UNHCR will be in a good position to continue their work with UNDP funding when UNHCR reduces its operations in Rwanda.

The Rwandan Women's Initiative (RWI) of the UNHCR is one example of a well-intended program that has yet to realize its potential. One of the major obstacles for RWI and other programs is capacity: the Government and local NGOs do not have the skills or mechanisms in place to implement programs. For example, local organizations do not have basic management abilities or vehicles, computers or telephones. Those that do have these resources are based in Kigali and often have limited ability to reach rural, illiterate women and their families. The Government of Rwanda and UNHCR should permit more participation by international NGOs which can provide technical support, including financial controls. At the same time, international NGOs should take more initiative in partnering with local organizations.

Rwandan women's organizations are committed to assisting rural women, but want and need training in project planning and management, including proposal writing and budgets. This training needs to be practical, emphasizing skills, not technology.

There continues to be an urgent need for better protection programs and human rights monitoring. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNHCR, together with regional actors like the Organization of African Unity, should devise strategies to protect women and children from armed conflict. These should include funds for legal assistance, education and training of local leaders in government and in the private sector, and human rights, with special emphasis on women and children.

In the national genocide trials, only two people have been charged with crimes of sexual violence. Most protection and assistance activities are focused on the capital city of Kigali, with limited programs and monitoring in rural areas, especially in the northwest of the country. There are regular reports of murder and rape, but there is little international presence to monitor the situation. Protection efforts should be improved, with rights training for prosecutors, police and other justice officials.

Comprehensive reproductive health services should be available, including prevention and treatment of AIDS. Programs to address violence against women and the girl child, including domestic violence, should be initiated.

Donors should study the impact of assistance to ensure that it is not aggravating ethnic tensions instead of alleviating them. Many returnee women, who are primarily ethnic Hutu, expressed resentment that they were not able to access goods or services and that all assistance was targeted toward genocide survivors.

## Children

A great deal more could be done to assist children and, again, coordination is key, as national coordination on children's issues is weak. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNHCR should assist the Government of Rwanda in strengthening mechanisms in place (Social Welfare Committees and the National Children's Program) to better maximize resources and to ensure a cohesive national policy.

There is an absence of national policy on key issues affecting separated and orphaned children. UNICEF and UNHCR should provide immediate technical support to assist the Government in developing a national policy covering all children in difficult circumstances.

Children's centers are being threatened with closure because funds are shrinking. A time-limited, child-centered plan should be put in place to reintegrate all groups of children in the community, provide more family-like care for children remaining in residential care and provide incentives and technical advice to transform centers from "orphanages" to community centers.

Children in spontaneous foster care have not been systematically identified for family tracing purposes. Before the national tracing program is phased out, resources should be directed to assist this group in finding relatives.

Girls, particularly adolescent girls, are invisible. Their needs should be assessed and programs to assist them implemented immediately.

Although most UN and Government of Rwanda officials agree that education and vocational training should be a top priority, the majority of children are not being educated and adolescents are not learning trades. The international community needs to assess how to increase access to formal and non-formal education for all children and adolescents.

# Summary of Delegation Objectives

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children visited Rwanda in September 1997 to investigate conditions facing women and children genocide survivors and returnees and to look at progress toward reintegration and rebuilding. The delegation interviewed dozens of Rwandan women and youth, as well as Rwandan Government officials and United Nations representatives, nongovernmental organization staff and others who have studied the Rwandan genocide and conflict.

The objectives of the mission were to identify gaps in policies and basic services for women and children and to make recommendations to policy makers regarding these issues.

# Women: Survivors and Returnees

## Overview

The genocide of 1994 claimed the lives of approximately 800,000 people in Rwanda. It left thousands of women widows and thousands of children without parents. Survivors' groups of women proliferated in the months following the war: women gathered together to offer each other moral and, sometimes, financial support.

Violence against women during the genocide has been well documented. Human Rights Watch/Africa issued a report in September, 1996, chronicling the brutal acts of sexual violence that were commonplace dur-

## Rwanda: The Refugee Experience

The refugee problems of Rwanda during the early 1990s fit into an intricate pattern of civil unrest in Central Africa over the past century. Since 1886, when the Congress of Berlin established the artificial borders of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Congo, people have been migrating for economic opportunities or fleeing from persecution. Although borders have held constant, the ethnic identity, status of citizenship and refugee classification for the population have changed regularly.

The Belgian colonizers of the region utilized a system of patronage that benefited the Tutsi minority (approximately 10 to 15 percent of population) over the Hutu majority, granting them better education and land and more powerful positions within local administrative structures. In 1959, the Belgians switched their political and economic support to the Hutu majority as they prepared to grant independence to Rwanda.

This led to widespread persecution of Tutsi as the new Hutu leaders exerted their power. From 1959 to 1960, an estimated 150,000 Tutsi were killed and another 300,000 fled into neighboring countries of Uganda, Zaire and Burundi. In 1962, Rwanda became independent, with a Hutu government. The Tutsi diaspora lived in their adopted countries for the next 30 years.

In the late 1980s, international pressure pushed Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana to implement the Arusha Accords, a comprehensive treaty to repatriate and resettle Tutsi refugees, open the political process of multi-party democracy and seek full integration of military and civilian structures within Rwanda. In October 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi rebel military group, invaded northeast Rwanda from Uganda. A civil war continued for the next four years and pressured Habyarimana to work towards a negotiated settlement to the war. However, Hutu extremists reacted to moves toward reconciliation by intensifying their campaign against the Tutsi minority.

On April 6, 1994, President Habyarimana was killed when his plane was shot down. The Hutu extremists blamed the RPF, all Tutsi and those Hutu who sympathized with the Tutsi. They called for the slaughter of all Tutsi and thus began another series of massacres. These killings, a true genocide, lasted for approximately four months, taking the lives of approximately 800,000 Tutsi and liberal Hutu.

During this period, the RPF continued to gain territory. Eventually the RPF won the war, pushing the Hutu army out of the capital, Kigali. As the army and Government retreated and fled, they called on the people of Rwanda to flee with them, and the result was a massive exodus of some 2 million people.[1] Most of these peo-

ple became refugees in Zaire, Tanzania and Burundi, in camps supported by the United Nations and the international community to the tune of $300 million per year from 1994 to 1996.

During this time the RPF established a government, began rebuilding administrative structures and saw the return of hundreds of thousands of the Tutsi who had fled the country during the previous thirty years. These people—who have come to be called "old caseload" refugees—have assumed many of the top Government positions and best jobs with international organizations operating in Rwanda.

Meanwhile, the former Government and army of Rwanda assumed control over the 2 million refugees in the camps, creating an armed and militant community in the Goma camps in Zaire. They formed militias that soon began cross border raids into Rwanda. The Government of Zaire supported the former Hutu regime and began to persecute ethnic Tutsi in the North and South Kivu regions of eastern Zaire. Many of these Tutsi were members of families that had lived in Zaire for several generations.

In late September, 1996, the governor of South Kivu announced that ethnic Tutsi were no longer citizens of Zaire and had to leave the country within one week. In response, Rwanda and Uganda supported the Tutsi of South Kivu in a rebellion that quickly gained momentum. In November, 1996, the Tutsi rebels were unified under the Alliance for the Liberation of the Congo under rebel leader, Laurent Kabila. In a few months, this rebel army forced the closure of all of the refugee camps in eastern Zaire, pushed the Hutu militias deeper into the Congo Basin, and prompted 600,000 refugees to pick up their belongings and return across the border to Rwanda. A few weeks later, the Government of Tanzania supported a forced repatriation to Rwanda of 480,000 refugees who had been living in its northwest region.

Today, the Government of Rwanda continues to be at war. It is staving off violent raids in the northwest prefectures of Ruhengeri, Gisenyi, Kibuye and Cyangugu, where Hutu rebels have attacked schools, civilian neighborhoods and individual families.

ing the murderous campaign of the Interahamwe in the spring and summer of 1994.[2] The World Health Organization, Amnesty International and others have published accounts of the rape of women and girls during that time.

Soon after the genocide, the new Government of Rwanda estimated that 70 percent of its population was female. Since that time, more than 1 million refugees have left the camps in Tanzania and Zaire and made their way back to Rwanda. A new demographic study by the Government of Rwanda, published after the refugees returned, estimates that 54 percent of the population is female. It found that approximately 34 percent of households are headed by women.[3]

The Government estimates that 64.4 percent of female heads of households have had no education, 27.5 percent have had primary education and only 8.1 percent have had some post-primary vocational or secondary education. It also notes that while only 27.3 percent of female heads of households can read and write, 55.4 percent of male heads of households can do so.[4]

One of the poorest countries in Africa, Rwanda's gross national product per person was $180 in 1995.[5] Throughout the delegation's visit, poverty was listed as the root cause of most social problems. The international community will spend some $1 billion this year to help in the rehabilitation of Rwanda, but these funds have not been able to heal Rwanda's psychological scars or continuing deadly conflict.

## Legal and social status

Customary law does not allow women to own or inherit property. In fact, women are considered the property of their husbands. In most areas they are considered minors who must seek permission from their husbands to conduct business or travel. The Ministry for Gender, Family and Social Affairs (MIGEFASO) is working to change the law and to address gender inequalities that have existed for centuries. Citizenship law is an example. Children inherit their father's nationality in Rwanda. If a Rwandan man marries a foreigner, she can become Rwandan. A foreign man who marries a Rwandan woman, however, cannot become Rwandan, and their children are not considered Rwandan. Another example is the penal code: when a man commits adultery he can

be sentenced to six months and a fine of 1,000 Rwandan Francs. A woman who commits adultery can receive more severe punishment – up to one year in prison.

MIGEFASO has reviewed the laws of Rwanda to find those that are biased against women, revised these laws and submitted to the Parliament legislation to codify the changes. It plans an awareness or "sensitization" campaign to educate the public about the discriminatory nature of these laws and the need to change them. Officials say a public education campaign is important to the success of the legislation because they anticipate resistance.

One lawyer involved in the legal revision project noted that the country's high level of illiteracy means the Government needs to explain the changes to the people directly. Others in the ministry and throughout the Rwandan Government agree that it will be a challenge to get Parliament to make the needed changes.

In addition to the legal challenges, women's status as second class citizens has left them ill prepared to take on new responsibilities. Women are traditionally not decision makers in households and have little experience earning income. In politics there have been few women who have been appointed in Government positions. In fact, their lack of experience in these areas has prompted MIGEFASO to create women's committees at the local level to allow women the opportunity to learn important leadership skills, with the idea that this will give them opportunities to discuss community issues and learn to make decisions. Although these are positive steps towards empowering women, it will be a long time before their voices are truly heard within Government.

## Protection

Some areas of the country are off limits to international organizations because violence continues, with raids by Hutu rebels. Recent reports of murder, rape and kidnapping are coming from the northwest prefectures of Rwanda. The United Nations has not been able to provide protection for a number of reasons, including the murders of two international human rights monitors in February 1996.

Throughout the fall of 1997 there were reports of attacks on civilians, including murders of school children, nuns and entire families. Genocide survivors say they are still very afraid of Hutu extremists. One woman from Gisenyi said she does not leave her home without bringing along her young daughter because she is afraid she might return home sometime to find her daughter murdered.

Other survivors said they were afraid to testify against the perpetrators of rape and murder for fear of retaliation against them or their families.

One recent returnee explained that she her husband was killed when she left Rwanda. When she and her children returned to her home in Rwanda from the refugee camps, she found her brother-in-law living there. She is now pregnant by him, but he does not support or assist her in any way.

Domestic violence appears to be a huge problem, but there is very little information or data about it and no services to prevent or treat domestic violence cases. The women's association, Hagaruka, has published brochures and information about women's rights in society and within the family with support from the U.S. Embassy. However, few women read and Hagaruka needs resources for dissemination of these materials.

UNHCR, which monitors returnees as part of its mandate, does not appear to be systematically interviewing or visiting returnee communities. In some parts of Rwanda, protection officers have not been given ori-

### UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' *Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women* include ways to protect refugees by including them in program planning. For example, the Guidelines recommend concrete ways to address abuses against women and girls:

- Establish training programs for field workers and community workers to make them more aware of the rights of women and their responsibilities to provide protection for them.
- Offer education programs for women to apprise them of their rights and the recourses open to them if their rights are violated.
- Assess the legal standing of refugee women who have been integrated into local communities, with particular attention to legal provisions that limit the rights of women, e.g., property rights.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

entation briefings or trainings to help them to carry out their assignments. A UNHCR representative admitted that they have not adequately monitored protection issues.

Regarding past and continuing sexual violence against women, only two people have been charged in the Rwandan genocide trials. It seems that prosecutors have not been trained to ask about rape and other forms of sexual violence. In interviews with one group of survivors, the women said they do not want to come forward and admit they were raped. "What good does it do us to talk about it?" asked one woman.

## Shelter

Thousands of homes were destroyed during the war in 1994 and thousands more fell into disrepair when their owners fled across the border to Tanzania and Zaire. Also, following the takeover by the Rwandan Patriotic Front, some 800,000 old caseload refugees (people who had fled earlier periods of violence and repression, many in 1959-1960) returned to Rwanda and needed housing.

As the refugees returned in 1997, they moved back into their villages. Many genocide survivors are now living next door to perpetrators. In one shelter project for widows, their houses are being built a few hundred yards from the local prison, where hundreds of men accused of genocide are locked up.

The international community has thrown itself into the repair and construction of houses. Typical of these efforts is a housing construction effort for widows, supported by the International Rescue Committee. The 17 women who will receive houses are widows from the 1994 genocide. They range in age from 30 to 40.

A national plan of creating new villages has been strongly advocated by the Government and thousands of new houses have been built in designated areas. This is essentially an attempt at social engineering. The new villages are organized in long straight rows of houses

## What Rebuilding Means in One Community

Duhozanye Association is a widows' organization that was created by village women after the genocide. The founder and president of the association, Daphrose Mukarutamu, describes how it got started:

"After the genocide, the widows decided to get together. There were 310 of us. When the war ended, we had lots of problems and no one else would help us solve our problems. One of the problems was that we had no shelter and everything was looted. Cows were stolen, along with everything. We were also traumatized. We were so lonely and isolated. We needed other people to show their feelings because they had the same problems.

"At the first gathering – it was mostly crying, talking, but mostly crying very much – we talked to each other and told each other what happened to us.

"Little by little we got accustomed to the situation – crying wasn't the solution. We thought of activities to do. We thought about getting lodging and getting houses. Everyone would look around and see who of their neighbors had taken their belongings. You could find your doors, iron sheets, tiles from the roof, and you would take them. We worked together to carry all the things we found that were stolen from us. A group of four or five would build for one, then go to another to build a shelter for her. If it was too difficult for us, we would go to the local authorities and ask them to help build the house.

"In Rwanda women are not allowed to go on the roof. That is the man's job. At first we'd go out at night to repair our houses, so no one would see us. But then someone found out and gave us pants to wear. Then we decided it did not matter if anyone laughed. We went out during the day.

"That's how we built 60 houses over a five-month period. The first ones were easy because the owners could find some of their old materials. For others, they needed materials and needed funds for them.

"A woman would decide to raise the walls of the house; once she got walls UNHCR gave iron sheet and the association would provide two doors. Of 310 women, only 50 don't have houses yet.

"Apart from building, we thought of other activities to bring in some income. A branch of UNDP helped us buy goats and pigs. One group took goats, another took pigs. When they had babies, they would exchange so that each person had a goat and a pig.

"Now we are helping orphans who can't go to school. We are teaching reading and writing to those who can't go to school. To young girls we teach sewing."

on the top of a hillside. They are spaced closely together and offer no privacy or small plot of land. Villagers who move into the new structures are given a plot of land which may be a few kilometers away. This is very different from the traditional Rwandan village, which is made up of houses scattered around a hillside, near to family land. Unfortunately, many of the completed houses appear to be uninhabited and one UN official noted that entire villages of houses stand empty because people do not want to live in the remote regions where they are located.

In the Matongo resettlement village, women told the Commission that they lived too far from the local health center. "If someone is pregnant or has malaria, they will not be able to walk to the health center in time. The NGOs that were working here before have finished their work and they do not pass by here with their vehicles anymore so it is difficult to get a ride," explained one resident.

In another resettlement village, women said that some of the food which was to be distributed to them and other families had been diverted and sold by the men in charge of distribution. They also complained that although they were promised houses first, they are still living under plastic sheeting. "I dug the foundation for my house myself, with my own hands. But those who are supposed to help us build our houses want money for it. We don't have money. Sometimes they will work for food, but now we don't have food either." The women said they were not consulted in the planning of the village or the current projects designed to benefit vulnerable groups in the village. The UNHCR *Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women* call for all programs to consult with women in the design, planning and implementation of projects. The UNHCR staff and implementing partners in these areas should consider a training on women's participation and protection.

## Economic status

Rwanda is an extremely poor country, with very limited land supporting a large number of people. Most women are subsistence farmers, some eke out a living selling food or other goods in the marketplace. Many women the delegation interviewed cultivate fields for others in exchange for food or cash. As in many African countries, women are responsible for household work, child rearing, farming, water collection and gathering of fuel wood.

The lack of land has put extreme pressure on the country and the UN Development Programme is one of the organizations considering this problem. UNDP says alternative methods of income generation must be adopted if the country is to sustain the population. "The deeper underlying problem in Rwanda is the land problem," noted one UNDP official.[6] "De facto it is behind all the troubles. In the next generation the country will face another crisis—there will be a critical shortage of land. The Government needs to reform the land laws, reform the use of land and reform patterns of settlements. The land problem is a food security problem and livelihood problem. This is one of the reasons alternative income generation strategies are needed—more people need to exit subsistence farming. So, we need training, credit and enterprise opportunities. This is the real reintegration strategy."

The impact of this problem on women is severe. Because they cannot inherit land, they have few options for survival if they are not married or living with a male relative. At the same time, it is shameful for adult women to continue to live with their parents. "When a woman loses her husband and must live with her father, everyone feels sorry for her," explained one woman activist. "She will build a small house of banana leaves on her father's property and people will know her situation is a bad one."

Because women do not own property, they have difficulty obtaining loans through traditional means. They have nothing with which to guarantee the loan. Recognizing this, many international assistance programs are focusing on income generation activities for women and girls. There are programs that offer small amounts of capital for people and groups who lack conventional means to secure income. Some programs are producing excellent results; in one case, women have invested in chickens and sale of the chickens will help them to pay school fees for their children. However, not all income generation projects are well thought out. For example, income generating projects targeting young women often involve traditional handicraft activities, such as sewing, knotting and embroidery. The delegation visited a number of sewing cooperatives; when participants were asked whether they made money, they admitted that they made only a very small profit. At one site, girls were learning to make cheese, but local people did not eat cheese, so they were forced to ship the cheese to the city. Microenterprise activities need to be well consid-

ered, with feasibility and market impact studies before asking women and girls to invest their precious time. Women and girls in refugee camps in other parts of the world have successfully learned carpentry, house building and latrine construction. These activities should be made available to them in Rwanda as well.

Recent returnees do not appear to have much access to goods and services, but there is no monitoring of their situation. Returnee women in resettlement villages told the delegation of their limited access to housing. Other returnees said they never received the seeds and tools UNHCR provided to returnees.

## General and reproductive health

The Ministry of Health is responsible for the provision of health care services for all Rwandans. According to a report by the Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium, medical supplies and contraceptives are often unavailable in Rwanda.[7] This, plus the fact that most Rwandans have to pay for medical services or live far from health facilities, means that most people do not have access to clinics or medicine.

Rwandan women face a serious health risk during pregnancy and childbirth. Maternal mortality rates are estimated to be as high as 810 per 100,000 live births.[8]

HIV/AIDS is taking a tremendous toll on urban and rural communities. Rates of HIV seroprevalence in urban centers are among the highest in Africa, reaching near 30 percent, and the semi-rural populations have reportedly experienced a dramatic increase in HIV. Estimates of the current infection rate range from eight to 20 percent. The high incidence of rape and sex for money in refugee and displaced camps may serve as explanations for this increase in HIV-positive cases. Girls heading households and street children are at extremely high risk of contracting HIV. Yet the Women's Commission found few medical services for women. In one village, a rape survivor who appeared emaciated and weak, told of constant pain. Her friends say they suspect she contracted AIDS when she was raped. She says she has nowhere to go for medical help.

# Key Programs for Women

The international community has earmarked approximately $60 million for programs to benefit women and children; most of the programs for women emphasize shelter construction and income generation activities. Although efforts to reform laws, provide health care and improve education and training opportunities are underway, they are not well coordinated or far-reaching in terms of geographic coverage. All projects directly benefitting women must be approved by the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Affairs (MIGEFASO), but the ministry is slow and a number of local NGO representatives complained about its inability to address real needs.

MIGEFASO is a powerful ministry, unlike parallel institutions in other countries, which are often weak and ineffectual. (In some countries, the Ministry for Women or Gender is a ceremonial institution: the minister is called on to host delegations and to participate in conferences, but does not have any real authority to implement programs or influence policy.) This can be attributed to two key factors: a strong minister, Aloise Inyumba, who was a key leader in the Rwandan Patriotic Front during its early days in Uganda; and the availability of funds from UN and bilaterals for this ministry. Eighty percent of MIGEFASO's budget is from international donors. But this ministry, like many other government offices in Rwanda, is struggling to implement policies and programs.

Minister Inyumba is the only woman minister out of 17. Of 70 members of the Parliament, 12 are women. There is one woman prefet of 12. Women occupy only 4.6 percent of the management positions in the civil service.

## Women in Transition

The Women in Transition (WIT) Initiative is a United States Government program which began in 1995.[9] WIT, which will have a budget of $1 million in 1998, operates through the Office of Transition Initiatives of the Agency for International Development in Washington. Total assistance for WIT/MIGEFASO will be $4.7 million through 1998.

Working in close collaboration with MIGEFASO, the program supports rural women's groups and national organizations for women in Rwanda. So far, WIT has

provided more than 208 grants for projects. One important aspect of the project is its use of Rwandan ministry staff—they operate under the direct supervision of the USAID coordinator. In this way, the Government staff learn important administrative and management skills as they travel in teams of two throughout five prefectures to work with women's groups. Projects funded by WTT include: shelter (65% of the budget), income generation activities (25%), and livestock (8%).[11]

WTT is a successful effort which has shown flexibility and responsiveness. "We can turn around funding for something in 10 days," commented the program director, Buddy Shanks. "Usually our first contact is with the local authorities. We explain the objectives of the program, that we are looking for vulnerable groups, widows' associations, etc. We explain the criteria and we'll get feedback about what associations exist and what associations were doing before the war and what they are doing now."

WTT funds only associations with at least seven people. The association must have something to contribute to the project—livestock or cash, for example. If they decide they want to do a shelter project, WTT provides the materials and the women are expected to build the houses. For microcredit projects, the association is asked to make a contribution. For microenterprise activity, the association is not required to pay interest. Instead, it pays back the principal into a communal fund for orphans or some other group. The association identifies the beneficiary in advance.

"One of our concerns, even though we have contacts in the Government, is that they don't have resources to identify groups that may be the most vulnerable," noted Shanks. "The Government in the communes has no vehicles, no resources to get around. The more time our teams are in the field, the more contacts they make, the more ability we have to get to the most vulnerable. Another problem is the lack of statistics; even the burgomaster doesn't know how many widows are in his area."

He also pointed out that in some prefectures numerous international organizations are working, sometimes providing overlapping services and competing for scarce local resources, such as the skilled artisans who make bricks. He noted one case where his program had made arrangements for an order of bricks, but another NGO agreed to pay more for the bricks, outbidding the WTT project.

One association receiving funds from WTT is located just outside Kigali. Marie Thérèse is the founder of the association, which was started in 1992. Seven women were involved at the start; today there are eleven. "We organized because our children were malnourished," Marie Thérèse told us. "We needed to buy meat, but it was too expensive. We thought about substitutes for meat and then thought of production of mushrooms."

Each member of the association makes a cash contribution. When they started out, they had no building or funding. One of the members lent them a room in her house.

Eventually, they received funding from UNDP. But in 1994, the war destroyed the house they used and they were forced to rebuild. UNDP assisted in the rebuilding effort. Also, some of their members died during the war. If a member dies, her survivors can inherit her position in the cooperative. The association received a loan of 500,000 Rwandan Francs from the WTT program. With this they built a small store and materials for the lab. For the WTT loan they have to pay back the principal only—it gets paid to the commune and the commune uses the funds for school fees for orphans.

The small store includes soap, pens, matches, Vaseline, laundry powder and soda. They have also been given a small plot of land by the Ministry of Agriculture. On this they grow tomatoes, onions, cabbages and eggplants. Marie Thérèse and the other women work at the store and in the laboratory, making mycelium seeds to produce mushrooms. The president of the association was trained in Uganda in making mycelium.

UNHCR is also providing funds to this group through its Rwandan Women's Initiative, which is described below. And at least one international NGO has approached the group to explore whether it might support some association activities.

## The Rwandan Women's Initiative

The Rwandan Women's Initiative (RWI) began as a $7 million effort initiated by UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, following media reports describing the rape and sexual violence against Rwandan women during the genocide. The media articles stemmed from the release of *Shattered Lives: Sexual Violence During the Rwandan Genocide and Its Aftermath*,[12] a report by Human Rights Watch/Africa describing the violence against Rwandan women and calling for immediate legal assistance, economic assistance, medical care

and psychological support for women in Rwanda.

RWI, launched in January 1997, aims to improve the economic status of women and strengthen the social structure of the country. It also lists as a goal reconciliation between the groups. The main target populations for the fund are female survivors of the genocide, including victims of rape and their children, and returnee women.

UNHCR and the Government of Rwanda have been slow in implementing the RWI. Of the $7 million budget, only $2.5 million had been spent in the first nine months of 1997. One-third of the funds go directly to the ministry. As of September 1997, the breakdown of the funding was:

- Rwandan Ministry for Gender, Family and Social Affairs (MIGEFASO) — $830,000
- MINISANTE (Ministry of Health) — $296,680 (specialist medical assistance for victims of rape — treatment that is currently unavailable at any medical institution in Rwanda; for establishing and equipping training facilities at Kigali Health Institute)
- Association for Promotion of Batwa Women (APB/Femmes) — $122,175 (first installment for education, crop and livestock production, pottery production, training)
- Association Rwandaise des Femmes de Media (ARFEM) — $200,000 pending for 1,500 radios and 1,500 women's radio clubs countrywide
- Club Mamans Sportives—$578,000 for construction of a women's center in Kigali, tailoring training school, adult literacy classes for women
- Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe — $615,850 (received first installment and held two-day workshops for member associations in April; received second installment at end of June).

One of the reasons for the slow start of the program is that UNHCR has ceded control of the funds to the Rwandan Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Affairs. This ministry has been unable to review and approve proposals in a timely way.

One UNHCR sub-office complained that dozens of important projects received no funding through RWI because of the poor central management. "We have been working with very good local women's associations and would have no problem allocating grants to local women. RWI needs to be decentralized."

"It took two months to get a signature from the Government on our proposals," remarked one woman who runs a local NGO. "Everything has to be approved by MIGEFASO; but we're not sure our project will be funded on time." Many women's organizations expressed dismay at the slow movement.

Many of the organizations visited by the Women's Commission complained that they had submitted proposals many months earlier and had been given promises of support, but had not yet received signed agreements

## Club Mamans Sportives

The brick building stands just outside Amaharo stadium in Kigali. A brightly painted mural on the front of the building shows a blue ocean and a female swimmer with the words "Club Mamans Sportives." Inside, there is no sports equipment, but there is a neat row of four desks, crammed into a small space. Next to this room, through a door, is a slightly larger room with eight machines which look like oversized sewing machines. They are embroidery machines. "We plan to train women to make dresses, tablecloths and other things. Then we will open a small boutique," explains the program coordinator, Emerita Mukayiranga. When asked about the possibilities for selling these items in a country where few people have jobs and people struggle for money for essentials like school fees, medicine and even food., Ms. Mukayiranga admits that it will be difficult to sell embroidery items in Rwanda, but says they hope to explore export opportunities to Europe and America.

UNHCR's Rwandan Women's Initiative is supporting Club Mamans Sportives' projects, including adult literacy classes, a tailoring training school and construction of a women's center. In one of the literacy classes one woman tells us that she can now write her own name. She says, "I am learning to read and write for my husband and children."

Club Mama Sportives was founded by a group of women who returned to Rwanda from Burundi when the new Government took power. Although the leaders of the NGO are of Tutsi background, they are serving a diverse population, with a special focus on women of Twa descent.

or funds in hand. The Association of Rwandan Women in Media reported that it had signed an agreement with UNHCR, but was waiting for a signature from the ministry. In the meantime, she has not been able to begin script writing or production of radio programs. "I can't understand it. I go to check about this every day. I have no car, so I take the bus. This is a process which is not quick. ... I have to have patience." Meanwhile, in reports issued in May, the women's media group was listed as being a project beneficiary.

Another NGO leader commented, "On the one hand we have many, many needs and on the other hand, there is money. But where is the link?"

"When this ministry started out, it had a dynamic and energetic staff, with people who really wanted to be there," noted one NGO manager. "That was unusual. But within two years, 11 senior staff had left because they were frustrated. Nothing was moving, projects would be approved, but then sit on the minister's desk." He said his NGO experienced repeated delays in working with MIGEFASO and on at least one occasion gave up an attempt to partner with MIGEFASO and found another ministry to work with in implementing a project.

Minister Inyumba recognizes the delay and attributes it to the lack of skilled personnel and availability of resources. "RWI assumed there was some organization, which is not the case," she said. "Reports give the impression that effective mechanisms are in place, which is also not the case. The problems we face in operationalizing the RWI include illiteracy, ignorance, the absence of statistics and a social situation where women and children are manipulated." She added: "Women tend to dance and entertain at local and national celebrations but are not represented at security meetings or where decisions are made about the allocation of building materials, seeds, tools and the like. Where women do participate, it is the advantaged who do, the disadvantaged do not. When you ask, 'Where are the women?' the answer is, 'They are at work.' "

Capacity is indeed an issue. One Rwandan woman working for a local NGO told the Women's Commission: "In the countryside, they have no computers, phones, faxes, electricity. Even in Kigali, some of our organizations don't have these things. We've applied to the UN to get equipment, but we didn't get a response."

The rural versus urban concerns are important and it is true that most of the funds have gone to organizations located in Kigali and other urban areas. However, many of the urban groups have proposed projects in rural areas and a few are well-established countrywide. Reseau des Femmes is one of Rwanda's oldest women's organizations and it has an extensive network reaching far into the countryside.

Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe is the umbrella group for 35 women's organizations countrywide, promoting women and development. After the war it added peace to its mandate. "Whatever we do now, we do it for peace, whether working on women's rights or for health," said Immaculee Habiyambere, director of Pro-Femmes. "We are seeking a dynamic change in Rwandan minds." Pro-Femmes is also doing capacity building with women's groups and is trying to develop strategies to move women beyond agriculture. It is teaching women trades, marketing and other income generating skills.

Another local group receiving RWI support is Hagaruka, which means "stand up" in Kinyarwanda. The group provides legal assistance to women throughout the country (see box).

Some of the women running local organizations realize there are numerous funding sources, each with its own priorities and practices. "We would like a direct partnership with UNDP," observed one NGO representative. "We are afraid if we have to work with UNHCR and present our proposals to the ministry for approval it will take a very long time."

## Hagaruka: Promoting Women's and Children's Rights

One local group receiving RWI support is Hagaruka, which means "Stand Up" in Kinyarwanda. The group provides legal assistance to women throughout the country.

Founded in 1991, Hagaruka promotes women's and children's rights. Hagaruka will use RWI funds to train 36 paralegals who will return to their communities and train others.

"I have received help from Hagaruka before when I needed information about getting a divorce," said one Rwandan woman who is regularly beaten by her husband. "It is the only place women can go for this kind of legal help," she added. "I hope they can do more."

## UNDP and UNIFEM initiatives

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has a "Special Window for Women" under its "Trust Fund," which totals approximately $1.5 million for 1997-98, and is financed by the Netherlands. It aims to respond to the needs of women through support for local NGOs and assistance provided to MIGEFASO. The program hopes to encourage decision makers to adopt a gender approach to development and provide women with greater access to opportunities for socio-economic advancement.

Overall, UNDP has raised $56.7 million for development activities in Rwanda, including education, housing and rehabilitation of public buildings.

The UN Program for Women (UNIFEM) organized a conference in September, 1997, on the implementation in Rwanda of the Beijing Platform of Action. The conference, which was attended by the Government of Rwanda, national and international NGOs and funders, created coordinating mechanisms to implement parts of the Platform of Action, including: revising national laws; providing access to women to basic services, including health; preventing violence against women; improving literacy; and establishing economic support initiatives.

There is a need for coordination and good planning. Rwanda presents a unique opportunity, where donors are paying attention to the specific needs of women. The international community must move beyond meetings to implementation of creative programs which build on the foundation that has been laid by the many women's organizations working in the country.

# Reintegration Issues

Few of the projects supported by the Rwandan Women's Initiative or other international organizations are benefiting refugee returnee groups or Hutu-run associations. In fact, it was difficult for the Women's Commission to interview recent returnees, as most of the programs are set up to assist genocide survivors or are run by "old caseload" refugees, people of Tutsi background who returned in the last three years from Burundi, Kenya, Uganda and other countries.

The Commission was able to interview approximately two dozen recent returnee women by stopping women as they returned from the fields, as they worked the fields, or, in one case, while they waited outside a prison to deliver food to their husbands. They told similar stories of having little access to services, no access to associations and feeling fearful of organizing themselves because it might draw attention to them.

The following are profiles of two women who returned from the refugee camps in the past year. They are more privileged than many women, having education, skills and employment. But they expressed a great deal of fear and anxiety about their lives in Rwanda today. Their names have been changed.

*Charlotte* returned from Tanzania in November 1996, a month before the forced repatriation movement. Charlotte's husband is a Tutsi, a fact that was kept secret in the refugee camps. They have three children. Their return was arranged by her husband's relative, who is a high-ranking officer of the Catholic Church. Charlotte was able to get back her old job in a retail shop in Kigali. Because she had received computer training from an NGO while in the refugee camp, she was able to get a better paying job.

Charlotte says her family lives in fear that they will be put into prison, even though they say they are innocent of any participation in the genocide. On the advice of the relative who helped them, her husband has not yet ventured out to search for employment. They have not approached the present occupants of their old home in Kigali. Charlotte explained that most of the returnees they know who tried to claim their homes were later accused of genocide and sent to prison.

Even though they are living in a tiny shelter with few amenities, they prefer not to take unnecessary risks for now. Their children are all enrolled in school, but the parents are unable to provide sufficient clothing, books, notebooks and other essentials. When they meet a former refugee from the camps in a public place they do not show any signs of recognition for fear of being associated with possible criminals. They do not go out after dark and do not socialize with neighbors or old friends. Basically, they trust no one except for close relatives.

Charlotte feels that in time things will normalize in Rwanda, but in the meantime they live an extremely guarded life and do not feel free to avail themselves of any Government-related benefits or activities. Charlotte reported that a number of the people she worked with in the camps had been put in prison; a few have died there because of the poor conditions.

*Janet* is single and in her late 20s. She was in the

camp with her sisters and an uncle. Janet's story is similar to Charlotte's except Janet had more difficulties with men trying to exploit her and her younger sister, who is 15. Janet forced her sister to sit in their uncle's hut during the hours that Janet worked, to protect her against the advances of men. Janet also paid part of her salary to the commune leader for special protection (although she said he never actually offered any protection). Janet herself had some "problems with men" during the exodus from Rwanda in July, 1994 but she would not talk about her own experience. She returned to Rwanda in December, 1996. She described a long and fearful journey from Ngara to Kigali. She has a job with an NGO and has found relatives she thought had died. She also does not socialize with returnees from Tanzania for the same reasons Charlotte gave.

Janet says that every returning refugee lives in constant fear. Only the most desperate dare to show up for the few special programs of assistance. Even with her present difficulties, she is much happier to be back in her own country and not living as a refugee. She has regular nightmares of refugee life. "I would rather die than ever become a refugee again," she said.

## Caring for prisoners

Every day, all over Rwanda, thousands of women travel to prisons to feed their husbands, sons and other relatives who are locked up, accused of committing genocide. The women bring buckets filled with food, clothing, soap and other essentials. They say these supplies last only three days. They are not permitted to talk with the prisoners, but they can see them lined up outside, or clinging to bars on the windows. It is a day-long journey for some women, who come by bus, taxi and on foot.

The Women's Commission interviewed 30 women outside a prison in the prefecture of Kibungo. In this particular village, hundreds of women lined up outside the prison and along the road leading to the prison.

Thirty-four-year-old Bernadette (not her real name) said they all struggled to stay alive and keep their families alive. "We consider ourselves widows. We are alone to take care of our children and feed our families. We cannot leave our husbands here to die and we do not have enough to feed ourselves or send our children to school."

Of the thirty women in the group, most said they returned from the refugees camps in Tanzania to their villages, but were not able to return to their original homes. They said they were living under plastic sheeting and cultivating fields owned by other people in order to make money to survive. They said they could not afford to send their children to school because they did not have enough money or any means to make money.

There is little sympathy within the Government and local assistance organizations for these women. Traditional practice in Rwanda says that women and children are the property of their husbands and fathers and should be treated as minors. Thus, they are often considered "genociders," who are guilty by association.

In another interview with a recent returnee, 34-year-old Jeanne stopped her work in the field to talk about her life since returning to Rwanda from Benaco refugee camp in Tanzania. She is the mother of seven children and her husband is in prison in Rwanda. Her ten-year-old daughter and 64-year-old mother have been helping her to hoe the field; she carries her eight-month-old baby with her. "My biggest problem is feeding my children," she told us. "The person who could help me is in prison. When my children are sick, I can't take them to the hospital, and two of them are sick now with diarrhea and high fever." She explained how they get food: "We try to find someone to hire us for the day in exchange for one-and-a-half kilos of lentils. But many times we don't get hired. Where we live there are many women like me, in the same situation."

Jeanne explained that she was lucky because some of her relatives returned to Rwanda before she did and had enough plastic sheeting to share with her.

## Reconciliation

Few people in Rwanda will say "Hutu" or "Tutsi," but coded expressions, such as "the others" are commonly used. Some international aid workers admitted that they feel frustrated by their inability to access returnees and other Hutu in need. They say because the Rwandan Government decides which communities benefit, it seems that mostly genocide survivors and "old caseload" refugees, or primarily Tutsi, benefit.

In interviewing one group of women, the delegation split into two small groups, interviewing women survivors in one room and returnees in another. The returnee women wore old and tattered clothing; they looked tired and hung back from the group. The survivor women watched the returnee women carefully,

straining to listen to the conversation they were having with the international delegation. The survivor women, dressed beautifully in clean shirts and blouses, some wearing high heels, spoke of their plans for their new houses.

There is a danger that returning refugees, who are struggling to survive, will grow increasingly bitter as they see projects and programs benefit survivors more often than not. "Old caseload" refugees have been able to receive lucrative jobs with UN agencies and international NGOs. Local women's associations that receive RWI funds are primarily run by survivors.

Survivors of the genocide continue to need assistance, and continue to fear attacks from extremist Hutu rebels operating in the country. There appears to be very little progress in reconciling the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups.

"Do not talk to me about reconciliation," said one survivor. "How can you expect us to welcome back the people who killed our husbands and children? We speak of coping, of finding ways to live alongside these people. We do not speak of reconciliation."

*Returnees on their way home after five months in a refugee camp in Zaire. Her husband and five of her seven children were killed in the 1994 genocide.* © UNHCR/A. Hollmann

## Women's associations support vulnerable children

*"Today, (relief assistance) is no longer appropriate aid for the Rwandan population. It will only encourage apathy within the Rwandan community at a time when people need to think in creative ways. ... The most appropriate development projects for Rwanda are those that prepare the population to meet their own needs over the long term, as NGOs will not stay in Rwanda eternally."*

*Theodore Simburudari, former Secretary General of the Ministry of Work and Social Welfare (now merged with MIGEFASO), Conference on Promoting Community-Based Care.*

The Rwandan Government is beginning to focus on mobilizing community support for vulnerable children. Within communities, women are most often the ones to take on this work.

There are a number of concrete examples of community-based follow up and monitoring of vulnerable children work in Rwanda. For example:

- On a national level, MIGEFASO recently began implementing a plan of action to establish social development committees at all administrative levels in the country. The purpose of these structures is to provide a mechanism for participatory child welfare planning at the local level. To date, with the assistance of several NGOs, social development committees have been set up in three prefectures. Although it is too soon to evaluate their impact, MIGEFASO reports a number of promising results. For example, in Byumba prefecture, committee members are actively following up vulnerable children. In Kigali Rurale, the social welfare committee has established a fund to pay school fees for vulnerable children in each commune.

- On a less formal level, there are numerous examples of community members' efforts to improve the lives of vulnerable children in their community. Examples include church work, women's groups and motivated, conscientious individuals.

Below are some case examples:

*Reseau des Femmes*

Reseau des Femmes is a women's organization with an extensive countrywide network. It was created in 1986 after the UN World Conference on Women in Nairobi. One active member of Reseau des Femmes in Giterama organized more than 90 children living in children-headed households into an association. To help them meet their basic needs, she negotiated for a plot of land from the local government. For agricultural tools, she requested assistance from an international NGO in the area. With this support, the children began to cultivate the land. Understanding that they needed more than material support, she arranged for monthly meetings so

that the children come together for cultural events and sports. During these meetings, many of the children discuss their problems with her. She is not paid, but feels that it is her responsibility to support these children in their struggle to become future citizens of Rwanda.

*Butare Women's Association*

After trying to repeatedly place four siblings, all girls, with family members, a center (orphanage) run by the Irish NGO CONCERN was finally approached by a local women's association which offered to "sponsor" the children. As the women had no shelter to provide the sisters, CONCERN built a house near the association members' homes. The association made a pledge to supervise the girls and provide them guidance and moral support.

The above examples point to the tremendous contributions community members have made to support children. Where it is not already happening, NGOs can be instrumental in promoting and reinforcing a community response. Save the Children-U.S and Red Barnet (Save the Children-Denmark), for example, have focused their efforts on organizing a foster family association to follow up and support vulnerable children in the community. Associations are assisted through income generating projects and training on child welfare issues. A portion of the profits is set aside to assist children and families in need. Red Barnet also partners older children with skilled community members to work as apprentices in a variety of trades, including carpentry, bicycle repair and sewing. Adolescents learn a valuable skill, while community "trainers" receive small incentives in return for their time.

There are obvious challenges to community-based work in Rwanda. In a divided society, "elected" representatives may not always work with equal effort for the well-being of all children in the community. A genocide widow may show preferential treatment to survivor children over returnee children. The international community and the Government must ensure that children are targeted based on need, not background. In addition, NGOs and the Government need to ensure that selected members of family associations and the social welfare committees represent all groups in Rwandan society (e.g., old caseload returnees, new caseload returnees, survivors, women).

Moreover, with the northwestern region in a state of civil war and increased reports of civil disorder, the community approach is not possible for all areas of the country. A number of these programs have closed down due to insecurity.

Finally, community-based monitoring and support requires a tremendous amount of capacity building on all levels. Basic training in community development techniques and social work skills is needed. Government and NGO workers have very little professional experience in social work or community development. One MIGEFASO representative estimated that only one to two percent of Government employees have a professional background in social work or child welfare. Anecdotal information suggests that this is also true of international NGO social workers. This is a real problem. Without an adequate skills base, the quality of social service programs will suffer. In addition, there is very little participatory community development experience in Rwanda. The Government and NGOs need training in the most basic concepts of community development. On a more practical level, local NGOs need training in basic management. One MIGEFASO representative explained that although she believes in supporting local NGOs over the international NGOs, there are no local NGOs in Rwanda that are "truly capable" of assisting vulnerable children. She attributed this to poor management and technical skills.

A number of suggested strategies to overcome these constraints include:

- Developing partnerships between international and local NGOs.

  Basic assistance, such as in accounting and computer training, is in high demand.

- Developing and providing both short-term and long-term social work training in order to build a pool of qualified profession social welfare workers.

  The University of Cork, at the request of the Government, has developed a 230-hour training program for Government representatives. Outside the social work program offered at a secondary school level and short three- to four-day NGO workshops, this is the first comprehensive training program in the country.

- Promoting the training of NGO workers in community development around children's issues. Community workers need to be experienced in true participatory community development techniques.

# Children

*"We cannot talk about women without talking about children. The two are inseparable."*

*Aloise Inyumba, Minister of Gender, Family and Social Welfare*

## Overview

The barbarity of the genocide and recent events in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) have left lasting scars on Rwanda's children. Over a brief three-month period in 1994, and again with the violence in the Congo, children witnessed firsthand the disintegration of a nation, the destruction of their communities and the murders of their families.

It is estimated that 300,000 children were murdered during the genocide.[14] For children who survived, the brutal violence touched their lives in the most personal way; they witnessed priests, teachers, local leaders and neighbors maliciously kill students, parishioners, parents and siblings. A UNICEF study found that:

- two-thirds of the 3,000 children they interviewed saw someone being killed or injured;
- 80 percent experienced a death in the immediate family;
- 80 percent had to hide to protect themselves;
- 16 percent reported that they had to hide under dead bodies to survive the genocide.[15]

*"They killed my mother and I fled, crying, to hide in the forest."*
*Drawing by Gasagure, a separated or orphaned child, at the Tumurere Center. Action Nord Sud, Handicap International.*

The Great Lakes region remains extremely volatile. In June 1997, human rights workers reported massacres of tens of thousands of Hutu refugees in eastern Congo by the Alliance of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADFL) soldiers. Often using aid workers to lure refugees out of hiding into a false sense of safety, ADFL military are reported to have slaughtered thousands of children and women using machetes and clubs. In one case, soldiers abducted 28 children recovering in a pediatric hospital. After their release, the children told UNHCR officials that they had been repeatedly threatened, intimidated and beaten with rifle butts and electric cable cords.

UNHCR's Program and Technical Support Section reported that the mortality rate of refugees in the first 24 hours after arrival in the transit camps in eastern Congo was one of the highest in UNHCR history. In one camp, the death toll was recorded as high as 116 per 10,000.[16] According to MIGEFASO in September 1997, children were still trickling into the country at a rate of 30 or 40 a week. These children, often condemned by survivor groups as the offspring of genociders, are often exempt from the same sympathy offered to orphans and victims from 1994.

The northwestern regions of Rwanda are in a civil war. In August 1997, after being shelled, Médecins Sans Frontières-Belgium was forced to evacuate more than 200 children from Murara Children's Center which lie just outside the city of Gisenyi. Thousands of Rwandans from the surrounding area have taken refuge in Gisenyi town to escape the insecurity.[17] During the delegation's visit, there were reports of school teachers and other civilians being murdered in their homes. The United Nations and international human rights groups have expressed concern about the escalating violence.

which is blamed on the refugees who use former Government troops and Interahamwe. Military sources say Hutu extremists have established bases in Congo from which to carry out raids.[18]

With more than 800,000 people murdered during three months in 1994, the chaos of return of more than 1.2 million Rwandans during the past year and the ongoing violence, hundreds of thousands of children were found alone, without adult supervision or protection. In general, it is estimated that in any refugee population, two to five percent are separated and orphaned children, or SOCs (see box below).

The Government of Rwanda estimates that the genocide alone left approximately 400,000 SOCs in country. ICRC and Save the Children-UK (SC-UK) registered more than 105,000 children in need of family tracing. Whether separated or orphaned during the genocide, as a consequence of the massive repatriation, or the continued violence in the region, SOCs deserve special attention. Without adult protection, they are considered the most vulnerable of all. In 1997, approximately 7,500 separated and orphaned children were repatriated to Rwanda via airlift.

## Children Living in Centers

Probably the most visual group of SOCs in any emergency are those children cared for in children's centers. These institutions can act as a short-term safety net for SOCs when relatives are being searched for or while alternative placements are being sought. An unintended consequence is that poor families struggling to provide their children with basic care and schooling traditionally use centers as a long-term coping strategy.

In early 1995, the Government of Rwanda reported that there were approximately 12,000 SOCs in more than 70 centers. Today there are approximately 8,000 children in 50 centers. This number has fluctuated over the years in relation to the closing of the internally displaced camps in 1995 and the massive repatriation in 1996.

Two-thirds of the centers established after the war were in direct response to the genocide. Although foster care was recommended by an expert coordination group[19] in the earliest stages of the conflict, the urgency of the problem and the large numbers of children found alone resulted in placing children in residential care. Using abandoned buildings, such as schools, churches and private homes, most centers were established by RPF soldiers in collaboration with volunteers. At a later date, a multitude of national and, particularly, international organizations mobilized to support or establish additional centers. In 1994, there were more than 50 national and international organizations running centers. Almost three-fourths of the centers in Rwanda were funded by local and international NGOs, one-fourth by churches and a small percentage by private individuals.[20] Most of these organizations, motivated by humanitarian values, provided professional care for the children. Some, however, used the high visibility of the situation to capitalize on opportunities for fund raising.[21]

The considerable media attention brought in millions of dollars to support centers. In addition to financial and material support earmarked for care and maintenance, several NGOs developed and implemented valuable psychosocial support and child care training programs.

### Separated and orphaned children

**Children who are separated or orphaned during conflict and flight are traditionally referred to as unaccompanied children (UACs) or unaccompanied minors (UAMs). However, many experts think the term unaccompanied minor does not accurately describe the situation. At the 1997 Bellagio Conference on the Repatriation and Reintegration of Unaccompanied Refugee Children, participants urged the international community to adopt "separated and orphaned children" (SOCs) as the new term. It describes any child under the age of 18, who is either separated from his/her parents, extended family or guardian OR orphaned. Separation can be the result of being lost, abandoned, kidnapped or on the run. These children may be living in residential centers, with foster families, in child-headed households or the streets. Child soldiers and children in detention are also included in this group.**

## Understanding issues surrounding residential care

Although the establishment of centers, often referred to as orphanages, is a common response to SOCs in emergencies, child welfare experts agree that the creation of centers should be avoided and discouraged,[22] because:

- A center cannot replace the love,

## Who is an Orphan: Understanding the Terminology Used in Rwanda

**Orphan:** In Rwanda, an orphan is traditionally defined as a child whose father has died. After the war, the definition commonly referred to children who had lost either or both parents. The distinction between Western and Rwandan understanding of the word orphan is rarely recognized.

**Orphanage:** Although the term orphanage implies a home for orphans, experts point out that the majority of children living in residential care are in fact NOT true orphans (by the Western definition). In Rwanda, a significant number of children living in centers are there because of poverty or as a result of separation from family during civil conflict. A UNICEF study showed that fewer than half of children in centers are orphans by the Rwandan definition. Statistics are not available on the number of children who would qualify as orphans by Western definitions. To avoid misleading the reader, the report will use the term "children's center" in lieu of the commonly used term "orphanage."

**Foster Care:** In Rwanda, there is no common working definition for foster care. The term foster care is used to describe both a situation where a complete stranger is caring for a child found during civil disorder or when an extended family member is caring for the child of a dead relative. In addition, there are two types of foster care in country: official and spontaneous foster care. Official foster care refers to care situations identified, screened and supported by authorized NGOs and approved by local officials. In this case, the majority of children are placed with non-relatives. Spontaneous foster care, on the other hand, refers to families that are providing care to children whom they voluntarily accepted into their homes.

affection and moral guidance a parent can provide.

- The longer a child stays in an institution, the greater the chance that he or she will become isolated and cut off from family members. This can leave a child without a sense of family identity or of belonging to a community.

- Once an adult, children raised in centers are often not able to cope in the real world. Accustomed to having basic needs met by professional staff, they frequently lack life skills needed to become self-sufficient.

- Centers create an artificial magnet for poor children.[53] Many centers offer services that the average Rwandan child does not have access to, in particular schooling. To give their children an opportunity to be educated or to help relieve the economic burden at home, poor families will often send one or more children to a center under the pretext of being separated or orphaned. As one NGO worker suggested, "Maybe centers should just be labeled what they are, boarding schools for poor children."

- Centers are not a cost-effective way to channel resources. MIGEFASO reports that it costs on average $45/child/month.[54] Compared to the gross national product per capita of $180, this is clearly a huge amount. Experts argue that international assistance is better spent assisting poor families care for their children through sustainable community-based programs.

## National response to children's centers

In August, 1994, the new Rwandan Government established its first national policy for separated and orphaned children which promoted tracing, reunification and foster care. This policy was based on principles of family unity and minimized support for centers. The policy was implemented through two major initiatives: the establishment of a national tracing and reunification system in late 1994 and the promotion of a national fostering campaign, better known as "One Child, One Family," in 1995.[55]

Despite the clear national policy to reduce the number of children in centers, many child welfare experts question MIGEFASO's (previously MINITRASO's[56]) commitment to actively carry it out. For example, although the number of centers in the country has dropped from 70 in early 1995 to around 50 in 1997, most centers closed due to a lack of funding, international NGOs leaving the country or the merging of two centers. Only one center in 1997 was closed by local government.[57] Moreover, as late as August 1997, the Government sanctioned the opening of a new center in Gitarama to care for 320 newly repatriated SOCs

despite other centers' willingness to admit a certain percentage of these children if they received financial backing."

This apparent lack of political will in the past to close centers is attributed to three main obstacles:

- Strong vested interest at the local level.

  Centers provide jobs and opportunities in communities. Tracing agencies commonly complain that center staff are uncooperative and sometimes obstructive to tracing efforts because they fear they will lose their jobs. Many times, center staff are related to or are friends with local government officials. One NGO worker commented: "It is not the international community that will influence the closure of centers, it is the local officials."

- An unstated belief among many Rwandans that children are better off in centers because their material and educational needs are being met.

  As one adolescent in a center expressed, "Other children in Rwanda think we are lucky, they are envious of what we have." Many local officials and ministry workers believe the same.

- No national legislation on centers.

  As long as there are no laws to govern centers, efforts to monitor and close centers will be undermined.[5] "Care and maintenance" institutions, often supported by religious organizations rooted in the traditions of charity, will continue to flourish. As one UNICEF representative stated: "The blame for the centers is on Western countries and religious organizations. They have perpetuated the situation."

## Major concerns on finding durable solutions for children in centers

Today, centers are in financial crisis. It appears, at present, that children's futures will be dictated more by the lack of funding than by proper planning. Supported as a part of the emergency response, many NGOs report that donors have ended, or plan to end, funding of centers. During the time of the delegation's visit, MIGEFASO estimated that there were between six and 14 centers that will close within the next six months. Other centers function on a month-to-month basis.

The closure of a large number of centers in the near future is regarded by many as a mixed blessing. On the one hand, when centers close, a large number of families that have placed children in centers for socioeconomic reasons will take their children back. However, return to one's family, especially a poor one, does not necessarily guarantee that a child will stay with his or her family. Although there is no information available on the number of reunified children who have aban-

### A Center's Vision

In July 1996, the local NGO Tumurere was approached by the Government to take over the N'dera children's center located 23 kilometers outside Kigali. Caring for 230 children, the center was previously managed by a German NGO which left the country. The transition was rough. Tumurere had no funding when it accepted responsibility of the center. It received emergency support, but still struggles to pay costs, despite the fact that its monthly expenditures are below the national average.

Under Tumurere, the center took on a new life. Within 14 months, 170 of the 230 children were traced and reunified with their families. In the interim, with UNICEF support, the center began to grow its own produce and bake bread. Not only did the children learn valuable life skills, but the center was able to cut its operational costs. With the support of Action Nord Sud, the center also began to work directly with the child care staff, commonly referred to as mamas. Many of the mamas are genocide widows and lived in the center with their children. To break down the care takers' resistance to family reunification efforts, the center began to support the mamas through income generating activities and shelter programs. The mamas quickly became part of the solution, actively working to trace the children's relatives. In the future, many of these women will foster the children in the center who are not able to find a relative.

The director has a vision to transform N'dera into a vocational center for the youth in the surrounding community. This is a much needed and requested service, but funding remains a problem. Despite the dedication and persistence of the director in finding support, the center is at risk of closing.

## Reducing Centers vs. Successful Reintegration

**Because international child welfare experts agree that centers are to be discouraged, much attention has focused on reducing the number of centers in the country. It is important to note, however, that although this is sometimes equated with finding solutions for children, actual experience shows this does not happen. For example, in the recent case of Kibungo, the abrupt closing of a center on orders of the prefet is reported to have resulted in hasty reunifications with distant and estranged relatives. Often grounded in a philosophy of family obligations, the family and child are rarely consulted or supported in this type of reunification.**

**For children who are not reunified when a center is closed, a significant number are transferred to other centers. In other words, the number of centers in country declines, but many children in the process do not find a family or a home. NGO workers report that transfers commonly result in increasing the size of other centers, breaking important bonds developed between children and their "mamas" at former centers, and sometimes loss of crucial information important to tracing efforts. As one NGO worker commented: "When a child is transferred from another center, he loses his identity. He is like is a new person. (For tracing) we start at zero."**

**If planning for the closing for each center is not based on each child's needs, the "closure solution" to centers only creates a multitude of new problems.**

doned their homes or been forced out, anecdotal information strongly suggests that many have. This is supported by statistics from a recent study by the University of Cork that showed 10 percent of street children interviewed had previously spent time in a center.[5]

By closing a center, many children, including the "hard-to-trace" and "hard-to-place," do not find a solution, but rather are transferred to another center. This has two main disadvantages: the number of children in each center increases, creating larger institutions that are ill-equipped to provide family-like care, and the loss of important information about the children gathered by care takers, making tracing efforts for small children more difficult (see box above). In addition, although some care and maintenance centers will close, others affected have shown a commitment to family reunification efforts and are providing valuable services to the community. In effect, it is more an issue of "how" centers will close than "if" they should close.

## Overview of strategies

Children in need of placement from centers can be classified into two groups: children in need of tracing and hard-to-place children. Proposed reintegration strategies include intensified tracing efforts, foster care, family mediation and community-based care. In the past, the Government and the international community have focused primarily on children in need of tracing. They have done little to promote other reintegration strategies that target hard-to-place cases, including reintegration of socioeconomic cases.

## Children in need of tracing

NGO workers disagree as to the exact numbers of children who can still benefit from the national tracing program coordinated by Save the Children-UK.[6] One top SC-UK representative estimates that there are only 1,000 children in the country in need of "pure" tracing and that consequently SC-UK is seriously considering phasing out its family reunification program over the next three months. Many NGO workers expressed concern over this proposal. Moreover, NGO staff working with more specialized case-by-case tracing programs commented that SC-UK will often label a child "untraceable" when in fact he or she is just difficult to trace.

"In the past, SC-UK and ICRC tracing programs moved children like a trucking operation," said one NGO worker. "There is an assumption that children will receive equal attention regardless of the 'handlers,' but one should never underestimate the power of one motivated person with limited resources to find the family of a child he knows and cares about. Children are not a logistical matter."

Another NGO staffer stated that the national tracing system tends to be "paper-centered, not child-centered." The delegation was shown SC-UK paperwork indicating that a child and father, both identified as a positive match in 1995, had still not been reunified by SC-UK staff.

Many believe that if current resources dedicated to tracing are redirected to more specialized, investigative



25 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

tracing methods, many hard-to-trace children will find relatives.

## "Inconnus"

The term "inconnu" ("unknown") refers to children who are unable to give complete information for standard tracing purposes. Included in this group are young children (usually under five), mentally handicapped children or traumatized children. Although there have been "inconnus" in centers and in spontaneous foster families since 1994, recent efforts concentrate only on recently identified "inconnus" from the massive repatriation in 1996 and recent returnees who are in centers. An estimated 900 children from the recent repatriation were identified in centers. MIGEFASO recently documented approximately 1,100 "inconnus" from 1994. There are no estimates available for "inconnus" who have been absorbed in spontaneous foster care.

"Inconnus" present a tremendous challenge to care takers and tracing teams in Rwanda. MIGEFASO reports that approximately 2,000 of the estimated 8,000 children in centers are "inconnus."

To assist "inconnus" find their families, ICRC, in collaboration with UNICEF, initiated a national photo tracing project in late 1996. The photo tracing program included producing and distributing a photo tracing album, organizing parent tours of a children's center and training tracing staff on how to work with younger children.

ICRC reported that more than 56 "inconnus" from a group of more than 200 children have been reunified as a direct or indirect result of the photo tracing program.

*Photograph from ICRC photo tracing book used to try and reunite separated and orphaned children with family members.*

This is a significant number considering the difficulty in tracing these children. However, it is important to point out that not all the eligible returnee children identified during the 1996/97 repatriation are participating in this program. As of September 1997, according to an ICRC representative, there were still 800 children who needed to be photographed. In addition, photo tracing only targets "inconnus" identified during the massive repatriation. At this late date, the effectiveness of the operation for these children is questionable. With a high level of photo "illiteracy," parents have difficulty recognizing recent photographs of children they have not seen in more than six months.

Photo tracing is just one tracing strategy used in country. Other creative initiatives have also proved successful. For example, through play and repeated visits, social assistants and care takers are able to build a relationship that is essential to helping children feel comfortable to tell their story. Small details collected when playing a game, such as a child's nickname or the color of a parent's bicycle, can provide the small leads needed to identify a child's mother, father or uncle. For exam-

### MIGEFASO's Plan of Action to Close Centers

**In response to the current funding crisis facing centers, the Government has put in place a four-step plan of action to reduce the number of children living in centers. The first step will concentrate on developing regional plans with local officials based on results of the recent census of children in centers. Step two will work towards intensifying efforts to identify children's families by mobilizing local leaders and community-based organizations. Children will also be transferred to centers in their prefecture of origin to facilitate more efficient tracing efforts. Once this phase is completed, the ministry will limit the number of centers to approximately 22. Lastly, MIGEFASO will work towards reorganizing the remaining centers into more family-like environments. On completion of this plan, the Government estimates that approximately 3,000 children will remain in centers.**

**Other tracing methods must be promoted to find relatives for this special group.**

ple, Food for the Hungry International, which is one of the only NGOs that uses radio announcements for tracing, reports reunifying one eight-year-old child after announcing on the radio that they were looking for the relative of a child whose father owned a red scooter and who remembered spending the night with a neighbor named Theresa. The child was reunified with his uncle within ten days. This, in effect, is detective work that requires dedication, persistence and patience.

## Hard-to-place children

Hard-to-place children include orphans, "inconnus" who have not been successfully traced, handicapped children, groups of siblings, adolescents and socioeconomic cases. These children often make up the residual caseload of centers.[32]

Hard-to-place children can be reintegrated back into the community through a number of alternative placement options. Proposed strategies in Rwanda include fostering, family mediation (see box below), independent living programs for adolescents, group housing and other community-based solutions. The delegation found that although there is national and international rhetoric supporting alternative placements, there has been little action to actually promote and support programs that assist hard-to-place children. One UNICEF staff member noted: "These strategies are only on paper." Several NGO representatives also reported that the Government is often resistant to pilot projects, as exemplified below:

- In January, 1997, MIGEFASO reported that more than 30 of the 50 centers had placed no children in foster care. Several prefectures have no active foster care programs.[33]

  Even when fostering is offered, it is a slow process. NGOs average only four to five placements a month. International Social Services, for example, with a team of two social workers, placed 60 children over an eight-month period.

- Although independent living programs, or "phasing-out" programs, are one of the options available for adolescents in centers, they are virtually non-existent in Rwanda. In one study, adolescents were reported to make up as much as 37 percent of the centers' population.[34] Some centers have been able to respond to individual children's needs through scholarships and vocational training programs, but no centers have developed a concrete independent living program that teaches essential life skills.[35]

- Although socioeconomic cases are estimated to make up a significant percentage of children in centers, there is no national policy on how to respond to these poverty cases. There are also very few family mediation programs in country.

- Rwanda has very little experience with organized community-based care for SOCs.[36] This includes supervised group homes for adolescents, church-sponsored housing and housing sponsored by community-based structures. This reintegration strategy can be appropriate for adolescents and large groups of siblings. To date, there have been very few pilot projects authorized in country. MIGEFASO remains cautious because it fears that the long-term result of these programs might be the creation of a new group of children-headed households. There are presently no Government guidelines for either group homes or independent living.

### Family Mediation

**Through family mediation programs, poor families receive counseling and material support to help them care for their children. Common problems encountered that can interfere with a successful reintegration include poverty-related problems, such as when a family cannot feed all the children in the household, or social problems, such as when a new step parent rejects the child. Although each situation is different, a skilled social worker can provide essential support to help a child reintegrate into his/her family.**

## Other major points to consider

Implementing a plan of action that is based on each child's best interest will take time, resources and an active commitment on the part of the Government and the international community. Although the international community has participated in finding solutions for some children in centers, there is much more that needs to be done. There are two main challenges that will set the parameters for future action:



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## Children Who Remain in Centers: the Need for Family-like Care

**The delegation visited the new center in Giterama for "inconnus," a traditional institutional model, where dozens of infants lay wide-eyed and listless on plastic sheeting in stifling, airless rooms.**

**Many child care workers in Rwanda agree that it is most likely that a certain number of children will remain in centers, but they should not be centers like this one. In addition, some "hard-to-trace" and "hard-to-place" children will spend a significant amount of time in centers before a solution is found.**

**There is an urgent need to develop more family-like care for both interim and long-term purposes. This can be in the form of foster care, community-based homes or family-like residential care.**

**Presently, there is no assistance to help centers reorganize in more family-like settings. Since family models tend to be less expensive than larger institutions, it is often more a question of organization and vision than of resources. Médecins Sans Frontières-Belgium offers an interesting alternative to typical residential care. Before the Murara Children's Center was evacuated to Gisenyi due to insecurity, children were organized into small groups of approximately ten children per two staff members. Each group lived in houses that were mixed among families in the community. Children participated not only in the chores of the household, but also in the life of the community. Even after the children were evacuated into a new building which did not allow separate homes for each group, children remained clustered around their care takers.**

- Funding

  As funding for centers runs out, many centers will be forced to close despite their commitment and willingness to find solutions for children in centers. Many children who could benefit from active reintegration programs may end up being transferred to centers with a more "care and maintenance" philosophy. In addition, innovative ideas to transform centers into community service centers proposed by a number of centers may never be realized (see "A Center's Vision," page 21). Most NGO workers the delegation interviewed estimated that it would take anywhere from 18 months to three years for all centers to be closed correctly. If this is the case, donors will have to reevaluate how their support can be earmarked to find good placement solutions for the children who remain in the centers. Funders committed to children in centers during the emergency need to ensure continued support during Rwanda's transition period. To avoid the trap of open-ended support to centers, donors can require that reintegration strategies are integrated into budgets.

- The "Hands-Off" Approach

  In addition to the funding crisis, many child welfare workers complain that there is a lack of innovative leadership by the international community. For example, UNICEF does not support the long-term institutionalization of children in centers and this may be the reason it has not taken a leading role in finding alternatives. UNICEF's involvement in centers includes providing major funding for tracing and reunification programs, providing support to foster care programs and limited financial support to select centers on an emergency basis.[7] UNICEF has not, however, actively promoted or supported other important strategies outlined in this section, such as family mediation programs, independent living programs and group housing. In addition, at the time of the delegation's visit, MIGEFASO reported that UNICEF had not provided the Government with any technical support to develop a comprehensive plan of action to phase centers out. Moreover, little, if any, assistance has been provided to the Government to develop important national guidelines on independent living and community-based care.

UNICEF and others should get more involved in the center issue. More creative and proactive programming is needed. By not recognizing the realities of the present situation, the needs of children are being overlooked.

One UNHCR representative recommends: "If you have a poor country with poor capacity, we cannot close our eyes and just stick to traditional mandates."

# Children-headed Households: a World of Children

*"I am fourteen years old and I am a child. I know I will always continue to take care of my (siblings). To me, a family is a group of people who care for each other when they are hungry or sick. I have a family, I just need a home."*

*Mushimiyimana*

Children living together as families have only recently gained national attention in Rwanda. Up until this year, they were virtually invisible to social welfare planners and to the international community. Now, however, the depth of their plight is being recognized. UNICEF's children-headed households (CHH) focal point commented: "Children living in children-headed households are marginalized in a different sense. They are not even part of society."

Children-headed households are not a new phenomena in the region. The AIDS epidemic has destroyed countless communities and families and in some cases created whole villages of children. What differs in the Rwanda context is the sheer magnitude of the problem, and the complexity of life in a post-genocide society. UNICEF estimates that there are 85,000 households in Rwanda managed by children.[38] In addition, with a high incidence of HIV in the country, the numbers of children living alone are expected to grow.[39]

A glimpse at the lives of these children highlights both their vulnerability and resilience.

Their strength is their sense of family and solidarity. Some of these households are managed by 12-year-olds who care for siblings as young as three years old. Despite the difficulties they face, they are not moving into children's centers. When asked why, one adolescent girl explained: "This is our ancestors' land. It is my home and this is my family."[40]

Their commitment to live as a family, however, is threatened by the difficulties of daily living. Their basic needs are often not met. Children live in inadequate housing and lack food and basic materials for cooking. Many children do not attend school, as they have to work. Children who are able to go to school are often not exempt from paying school fees by local school officials, a right granted all orphan children in Rwanda. The struggles of daily life eventually tear some child-headed families apart. One local NGO, Barakabaho, reports that a number of the children it has followed in Kigali have now become street children.[41]

Although many of these children have extended family members nearby, they feel isolated, exploited and ignored. Rwandans frequently state that before the war, it was in their culture to care for vulnerable children. But children tell stories of uncles stealing their land, aunts who turn a cold shoulder and cousins who ask for payment in return for help.[42]

Protection issues facing young girl heads of households are particularly daunting. Their low status as women, compounded by the stigma associated with living alone and the lack of adult protection, put these young women in a particularly vulnerable position. Social workers from one NGO working with CHH estimate that 80 percent of all girls who are heads of households must fend off sexual advances or are abused. Fearful at night, some young women are able to seek protection from neighbors. Others submit to silent abuse, unaware of how to protect or defend themselves.

UNICEF estimates that, despite their extreme vulnerability, CHH are only being assisted in one-third of all communes.[43] To date, there is still no national policy on CHH, and gender-specific needs are seriously overlooked. As in the case of adult women, assistance rarely includes education on rights and means of recourse or training local officials to respond effectively to cases of sexual abuse and exploitation. No CHH project the delegation visited included a gender component.

Presently MIGEFASO is recommending the following actions:

- Improve children's access to school.

  By attending school, children will not only be educated, but their well-being can also be monitored. MIGEFASO's Director of Social Affairs points out that access to education for the girls is particularly important: "Education for these girls is not only about learning, it is a protection issue."

- Promote sponsorship of child-headed household by community-based organizations.

  This strategy is already being implemented by a number of local and international organizations in the country. For example, World Vision successfully linked adult volunteers to groups of CHH in order to provide psychosocial support and moral guidance. In one instance, a widow donated her land to a group of 30 children to grow peanuts. CARITAS

has also been active in providing needed material support to children.

- Create child-headed household associations.

  Through associations, the Government hopes that children will be able to earn needed income, thereby helping them be more self-sufficient.

Progress has been made. In March, 1997, UNICEF sponsored a photo exhibit to raise awareness on the special problems facing children living in children-headed households.[*] Through family portraits and personal testimony, Government officials and the international community began to understand the hardships that these children face. As a response, several large NGOs have expanded their community support programs to include CHH. To improve services, both UNICEF and MIGEFASO recently appointed a special CHH focal point.

## Children in spontaneous foster care

Following the war and the massive repatriation, the vast majority of SOCs were absorbed into families and communities, but without registering them or going through any formal process (commonly described as spontaneous foster care).

Estimates of children living in spontaneous foster care range from UNICEF's figure of 9,000 to the Government's 200,000. This wide range may be explained by the fact that there is no common definition of foster care in Rwanda. Little is known about this group of SOCs.[*] Although it is recognized that fostering is an ideal interim or long-term solution, anecdotal information suggests that some of these children are exploited as child laborers, neglected or abused. At minimum, differential treatment is common. As one social worker commented: "You can always tell which child is a fostered child just by looking at him. He will often be thinner, have no shoes and is not attending school."

Many of these children have essentially been overlooked by national tracing efforts. Foster families that are either protecting the child, have ulterior motives to keep the child or are not aware of potential help, have not approached ICRC or SC-UK. Likewise, tracing organizations, with the exception of a few, have never made a systematic attempt to identify these children in the community. This is probably because children in spontaneous foster care arrangements are assumed to be better off than children in centers, and therefore are not a priority.

Valuable time and information have been lost for these children for tracing purposes. Plans to target children in spontaneous foster care for tracing have not been a priority, since SC-UK is actively considering phasing out its national tracing program over the next year. When questioned, a SC-UK representative explained that at this late date, it is very difficult to trace these children. In addition, in a country with so many needs, he argued, resources should be channeled into other priority areas.

Past experience has shown, however, that when political will is present, many "untraceable" children can be traced. For example, of the 46 young children evacuated to France[*] in 1994 and then repatriated in July 1996, ICRC found only 11 parents/relatives through standard tracing methods. Under the responsibility of World Vision, a tracing team using more investigative tracing methodology was able to identify 40 of the 46 within a six-month period.[*]

In reviewing future plans, it is important that advocates assess whether a child is truly "untraceable" or if the system is just not able to trace a child because of lack of resources.

# Street Children

*"Do not call these children 'myobo' (dogs), call them 'Rwanda Rwejo,' the Rwanda of tomorrow."*

*Dr. Joseph Bibozagara, Minister of Youth, Sport, Culture and Vocational Training at the opening ceremony of the national center for street children on September 14, 1997.*

Another group of children who surfaced in larger numbers after the war in 1994, and again following the massive refugee repatriation, is street children. It is estimated that there are 3,000 children living and working on the streets of Rwanda today.[*] Commonly referred to as *myobo*, a term derived from the name of a white man's dog, these children are perceived by Rwandans as delinquents and troublemakers.

A 1996 study revealed that 90 percent of street children moved to the street as a direct consequence of the genocide. Of the 144 children interviewed, 10 percent had lost both parents.[*] The 1996 research also indicated that just under half of the children interviewed were

both working and living on the streets. The other half were living with parents and guardians, but working on the streets during the day to earn money. Many work as dish washers, vegetable sellers and vendors. Thirty-three percent of the children who sleep on the streets cite reasons related to troubled family life, including neglect and abuse, as their motivating factor to move to the streets.

UNICEF and the University of Cork recently completed a study to assess the situation of street children after the repatriation of 1996.[4] Preliminary findings indicate that approximately 38 percent of the children on the street today are new cases, having moved to the streets since the repatriation. Chronic poverty and the stress it puts on families, not repatriation itself, are the main reasons for this increase. In addition, some children reported that they live on the streets because one parent is in jail.

## Street girls

One of the troubling findings of the delegation was that there is very little understanding of girls who live and work on the street. As one UNDP consultant said: "I have visited several street children's centers and I keep asking myself, where are the girls?"

As a highly "invisible" population, young girls are easily absorbed into families as domestic workers and market helpers. Others turn to prostitution for survival. The fact that they are not a visible population has created some confusion as to how to categorize them. For the younger girls, are they girls on the street, or spontaneously fostered children? Although this distinction may seem insignificant, such labels inform action and policy. There also seemed to be some confusion within the Ministry of Youth as to who is responsible for young girls. When asked what was their response to street girls, the general secretary of MIJEUMA responded: "We do not think about street girls, we think about street children. That is MIGEFASO's responsibility."

Only recently has the international community begun to investigate the situation of street girls, but information is limited and of small samples. In the University of Cork study, girls explained that there is tremendous pressure to engage in prostitution. A University of Cork representative remarked that "their numbers are low, but they are at much higher risk than street boys."

The lack of attention focused on street girls, along with other SOCs who are hidden behind curtains of daily life, points to the repeated pattern in Rwanda of attention and resources being channeled to the most visible groups. These girls have fallen between the cracks in Government mandates, NGO efforts and donor dollars.

UNICEF is in the planning stages of adapting a communication project called the "Sara Initiative" for use in Rwanda. This project, which has been used in Kenya, Ethiopia and Thailand, uses cartoon characters to raise awareness in the community about serious problems facing the girl child through stories about the day-to-day life of a typical adolescent girl. This is a much needed intervention.

## Adolescents

Another group of street children that has fallen between the cracks is adolescents. Whereas the majority of street children in other countries range in age from 10 to 14, the profile of street children in Rwanda indicates that the majority of children are 15 and older. Most services are not geared towards older children's needs.

Moreover, there are specific protection concerns regarding adolescent street children in Kigali. In April 1997, more than 1,600 street children were rounded up by the military under orders from Kigali city officials. Ignoring a plan of action that was developed by NGOs working with children and the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports (MIJEUMA), city officials abruptly moved ahead to sweep children off the streets and to place them in Shorongi camp, a detention-like "holding" facility 20 kilometers outside Kigali. In the first months, the children were guarded by armed guards. Although they are no longer under guard, the children still have no freedom of movement. A number of children have since run away from the center. The indiscriminate sweep removed children sleeping on the streets as well as those with parents and guardians who got caught in the police action.

Soon after the children were rounded up, MIJEUMA decided to divide the Shorongi street children into two groups, young children under 12 and those 13 and over. Many older children were sent to solidarity camps to receive civic education. This solution highlights the sensitivity of the situation, as solidarity camps were ini-

tiated to provide orientation for returnees. Some NGO workers suggested that the April sweep was, in fact, a direct response to the repatriation. Unable to distinguish returnee children from survivor children, the Government required most children over the age of 12 to attend the solidarity camps. What is of most concern is that, at the time of the delegation's visit, the international community had no information on this group. The coordination group[50] had not followed these adolescents since their transfer. In addition, according to a UNHCR community service officer, street children are not a priority because they do not fall within the agency's mandate. Also, the new UNICEF protection unit was not involved. UNICEF and UNHCR should investigate a number of urgent protection issues such as this one. Also, social service agencies should determine the status of reintegration plans. What has happened, and what will happen to these adolescents?

There is also some concern for younger children still residing in Shorongi. Government plans to provide basic services, such as education, to the more than 300 children still residing at Shorongi, have not been implemented. The Government blames the international community for not providing needed support. International workers blame the Government for the lack of planning and a non-collaborative working relationship with MIJEUMA and Kigali prefecture representatives.

Many child welfare experts in country question the ministry's competence to coordinate street children issues. Three major problems associated with MIJEUMA as the coordinating ministry were cited:

- MIJEUMA has no social welfare experience.

  Although the ministry has experience with vocational training, it has virtually no practical experience with child welfare and social services targeting children in difficult circumstances.

- There is little or no coordination between MIJEUMA and MIGEFASO.

  Whereas MIGEFASO has been working towards reducing the number of centers and has established regulations and guidelines for residential care, MIJEUMA is planning to open several Government-run, residential centers, which will not be subject to MIGEFASO's standards of care. In addition, MIJEUMA plans to establish an independent family reunification program.

  In 1997, the National Children's Program was established within MIGEFASO to improve national coordination of the ministries on children's issues. To date, the NCP has still not been approved by the Government as the coordinating body on children's issues. Hence, it has had little influence on MIJEUMA's independent policies.

- Child workers report a poor working relationship between MIJEUMA and the international community. MIJEUMA and UNICEF are also reported to have a weak working relationship.

Action to address the gaps in services for street children, develop a national policy and improve coordination is needed immediately. As the director of the University College of Cork Child Studies Unit pointed out: "These children are not yet hardened by street culture. There is still time to save them."

## Education as a Priority

The future of Rwandan children cannot be discussed without discussing education. Throughout the delegation's visit, education and vocational training were repeatedly cited as major priorities. A traditional Rwandan proverb states: "Education is worth more than birth." This belief was reiterated by children in centers, children in child-headed households, concerned parents and Government officials.

The recent demographic study indicated that only 54.8 percent of school-aged girls and 62.6 percent of boys are attending school.[51] Common reasons cited by parents include the prohibitive cost of school fees, books and uniforms,[52] distance of school from home, need for the child to work at home and lack of space in school.[53]

In secondary school, access is also a major constraint as state schools have a capacity for less than 10 percent of all primary school children to continue their studies. This rate is less than 50 percent of the African median. For girls, the dropout rate is steeper, as selection is often based on personal relationships rather than merit. In addition, parents are often unwilling to let their daughters attend boarding school.[54]

When parents are able to send their children to school, the quality of education is poor. Following the war, the majority of schools were staffed by unskilled teachers who lack motivation due to low salaries

## Special note on advocacy

There are important issues facing women and children that need advocacy. However, many of the NGOs that the delegation interviewed said it was very difficult to promote new ideas and solutions to difficult problems because the Government distrusts the international community.

Outside ideas are often not welcomed. One high-level UN official commented: "I kept asking myself why we are such well-trained dogs. Then I realized that we trained the Government to treat us that way." He went on further to explain that a pattern of weak advocacy efforts was established early on with the new Government as a result of the international community's guilt for not stopping the genocide. To compensate, international assistance was offered without serious negotiations of conditions. It is only now that agencies are attempting to break this pattern. "We are trying to enter into a new phase of constructive dialogue," said the official.

There is an urgent need for stronger advocacy on important protection issues facing women and children. For example, international officials told the delegation that returnee children in Kibuye prefecture were not adequately monitored. Although the delegation was unable to verify the situation, sources indicated that returnee children were neglected and may have died due to lack of adequate care.

For this and other situations, many international workers complained to the delegation that there is a serious lack of leadership in terms of a UN voice speaking on behalf of children and women, although UNICEF has created a new child unit based in Kigali. In addition, although UNHCR has protection responsibilities and the UN Human Rights Commission has related activities, these are virtually absent in the northwest. In fact, in September, the UN closed one field office due to financial constraints, when it was most needed. It is important to acknowledge the difficulties working in many parts of the country due to violence and insecurity. The UNHCR representative noted that they are short of staff and that access to insecure regions limits their ability to properly monitor the situation. A community services officer explained that staff are often asked to play a dual role as protection/community services officer. The head protection officer explained that protection officers are unable to single out returnees.

In addition to protection concerns, there is a stronger need for advocacy on basic child welfare issues. Many international workers describe UNICEF as too passive on some key issues. While it has been strong in advocating on behalf of children in detention, UNICEF has been slow to take up issues of children in centers, street children and the girl child. For example, UNDP was the first UN agency to take up the issue of street children. As early as 1996, it began collaborating with the Government to assess the needs of children living on the streets of Kigali and sponsored inter-agency workshops to begin elaborating national policy.

($35/month) and little or no training. Seventy percent of primary school teachers are underqualified.[30] The delegation also learned that teacher dropout, not just student dropout, is a major problem.[31]

With a national literacy rate of 68 percent and limited land, education, both formal and non-formal, is crucial. It will not only provide the foundation of basic skills needed to secure a livelihood in one of the poorest countries on the continent, but it is also crucial to the peace process. This sector is one of the smallest, receiving only 2.87 percent of international NGO funding. Education should be a high priority. The international community should consider school feeding programs at schools and other innovative ways to support schools.

# Conclusion

Rwanda has made significant progress in rebuilding its infrastructure in the past three years. However, all sectors—health, education, transportation, communications—desperately need qualified personnel and financial resources. Rwanda is still at war and its economy will take years to recover.

Rwanda faces tremendous challenges as it tries to fight off insurgents, rebuild its infrastructure, reintegrate refugees and assist genocide survivors. Building houses is a short-term project, building infrastructure is medium-term, but building the future of Rwanda requires long-term commitment by the Government, families, local communities and the international community. Women, children and adolescents must be full participants in this process, for they make up the vast majority of the population.

# Recommendations

## Recommendations regarding Rwanda's women returnees and survivors

1. UNHCR and UNDP/UNIFEM should **consider joint planning for their women's programs,** so when UNHCR pulls out in a year or two, the projects will be allowed a smooth transition. They should also make specific requirements to the Government of Rwanda, so that release of funds is not delayed. Donors to these organizations should insist on seeing these plans. This could be done by:

- Setting up a joint advisory group that includes representatives from UNHCR, UNDP, UNIFEM, UNICEF, MIGEFASO and possibly a few bilateral donors;
- This group establishing broad guidelines for projects and a proposal format, and agree on a system for reviewing and approving multi-year proposals. UNHCR might be responsible for funding projects in years one and two, while UNDP and others agree to fund additional years.

2. UNHCR and implementing partners need to focus on **training and capacity building for the Rwandan Government, local NGOs and local staff** who are usually the direct point of contact for communities. Most local staff are men because they read and write. UNHCR and its partners should:

- Hold People-oriented Planning (POP) training for NGO staff and Government officials;
- Recruit and train women for positions in government and NGOs.

3. The **Women in Transition program of USAID is a model** in a number of areas. It uses all Rwandan staff, coordinates this through the Ministry of Gender, Family Affairs and Social Welfare, and reaches hundreds of small associations around the countryside. It admits to needing to reach out even farther into the interior and hard-to-reach villages, but has a plan in place to tackle this problem. It does not require associations to pay back interest on loans, but does ask that the principal be paid back in the form of a grant to the local community.

4. Bilateral donors should consider **coordinating their funding** to women's programs, either geographically or by sector. This would help to expand the reach of the programs, ensuring that women throughout the country, not just in Kigali, are receiving assistance. They should:

- Use existing networks, such as Pro-Femmes and Reseaus des Femmes, to access hard-to-reach areas (Gisenyi, etc.);
- Monitor where funding goes to ensure all partners benefit and that beneficiaries from all ethnic backgrounds are included.

5. UNHCR, UNICEF and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights should **improve monitoring and protection activities,** especially in areas where security is bad. In these areas, women and children are especially at risk of rape, sexual violence and exploitation. Resources are very skewed in Rwanda—with most focused in Kigali and urban centers and very little in rural areas or the western prefectures. UNHCR should:

- Identify women's groups in each of the affected areas and fund legal assistance projects for the most at-risk women in these prefectures.
- Provide protection training to international and local NGOs so they can help monitor abuses.

6. Local women's organizations are committed to assisting rural women, but want and need **training in project planning and management,** including proposal writing and budgets. This training needs to be practical, using appropriate technology. It should focus on women in rural communities and in areas where security is difficult.

7. Only two people have been charged with sexual violence in the Rwandan genocide trials; sexual violence in all its forms is a major problem—including domestic violence. The international community should:

- Offer training to prosecutors and police in interviewing and working with rape survivors.
- Institute a major effort to recruit women as interpreters, interviewers and investigators.

8. **Reproductive health services** are not available in most parts of the country, yet AIDS was a major problem before the genocide and is probably as great or greater a problem today.

- More funds should be made available for these services;
- Education and outreach should be provided for women and adolescents.

9. One sector which has received few resources and little attention is **education.**

- The Government of Rwanda should institute a A massive literacy campaign targeting women and adolescents, which the UN and others should support.
- UNHCR's should pilot its Education for Peace initiative in Rwanda. This is an initiative to mainstream peace, reconciliation and human rights into UNHCR assistance programs.

10. Serious efforts must be made to **educate communities about the rights of women**:

- UNHCR's Rwandan Initiative's Initiative should support radio outreach as well as education and training in communities;
- UNDP's funds for women should support related efforts;
- HAGARUKA should expand and continue to receive support and technical assistance, possibly through a partnership with an international NGO.

## Recommendations regarding Rwanda's separated and orphaned children

1. United Nations agencies, other multilateral and government donors should **move education to the forefront of all child welfare planning.** Children and adolescents should have access to formal and non-formal education. Policy makers and service providers should specifically explore how to link schools with psychosocial assistance programming.

Schools can and should be integrally involved in providing crucial support to at-risk children and their families. It is recommended that:

- UNICEF and the Government of Rwanda consider hosting a national workshop to identify possible strategies to integrate social services and education planning;
- Donors increase support to formal education and vocational training;
- UNICEF and the Government of Rwanda establish and support an inter-agency task force to examine and promote schools as active participants in national efforts to assist vulnerable children and families in the community.

2. The Government of Rwanda should immediately develop a detailed national **"child-centered" plan of action to reduce the number of children living in centers** through intensified tracing efforts, fostering, independent living and family mediation.

3. The Government of Rwanda, UNHCR, UNICEF, ICRC and Save the Children-UK should immediately and actively **promote and support innovative documentation and investigative tracing methods.**

This should be done by:

- Conducting a rapid evaluation of current methods (e.g., radio, mobilizing local leaders);
- Sponsoring a national workshop to promote appropriate methods and mobilize community-based structures, the church and Government officials;
- Increasing financial and material support to proven and effective agencies;
- Regular monitoring of reunification by center and by child's profile (e.g., hard-to-place children, socioeconomic cases);
- Promoting the active participation of "mamas" (care givers) through training, supervision and incentive programs;
- Promoting the use of radio to trace children without complete information;
- Including in tracing efforts children who were absorbed by foster families "spontaneously" in 1994 and separated children who returned during the recent repatriation. National efforts to identify, document and reunite all separated and orphaned children should continue;
- Taking timely action for "inconnu" (unknown) children. They should be the first considered for foster care programs.

4. UNICEF and international donors should support the Government of Rwanda in **establishing a national foster care unit** with technical expertise.

This unit should:

- Develop and promote a national fostering policy, guidelines and strategies;
- Immediately ensure that all SOCs in all prefectures have access to fostering programs;
- Develop a strong monitoring and evaluation mechanism;
- Organize with service providers orientation workshops throughout the country;
- Develop national training module on fostering for Government/NGO social workers.

5. **Alternatives to centers** should be promoted, including independent living programs, group housing and family mediation efforts. UNHCR/UNICEF/UNIFEM should actively promote and support these reintegration strategies for separated and orphaned children.

This should include:

- Assisting the Government of Rwanda in developing national policy and guidelines for independent living;
- Ensuring that programs take into account special needs of adolescent girls;
- Promoting reintegration strategies through workshops and funding.

6. UNICEF, UNHCR and UNDP, with other international donors, should **provide transitional funding to assist centers in phasing out.** Funds should be earmarked for assistance to centers to make the transition into community service centers, providing things such as vocational training and literacy programs for the entire community.

It is recommended that there be:

- Funding for an interim period (18 months to three years) for centers willing to participate and for incentives to reorganize to reflect more family-like environments;
- Funding for pilot programs that will test new methodologies in this transition;
- Support for the human and material resources needed to accelerate and intensify tracing efforts;
- Reinforcement of the capacity of the ministry focal point for centers;
- Support for an outreach and education campaign targeting donors on the impact of institutionalization of children and promoting alternatives to "orphanages" during complex emergencies.

7. UNICEF, UNDP and other donors must make a long-term commitment to assist and support the Government to **develop a child-focused plan of action for children** who have no viable alternatives to supervised care.

It should be ensured that:

- Long-term care provides a family like environment;
- Children in long-term care are integrated into the local community;
- Strict entrance screening and monitoring procedures are adopted so centers do not grow.

8. UNICEF and UNHCR should have **permanent technical social welfare experts** in protection and community services.

To do this:

- UNICEF should require a technical degree for international Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances (CEDC) staff;
- UNICEF and UNHCR should support longer-term contracts for technical staff, including community services staff.

9. UN agencies should be much more **proactive as advocates for children**.

Immediate attention should be given to the following areas:

- UNICEF and UNHCR should ensure close and regular monitoring of returnee separated and orphaned children;
- UNICEF, UNDP, UNHCR and the inter-agency task force should track and monitor Kigali street adolescents transferred to solidarity camps;
- UNICEF and UNHCR should maintain programs in insecure regions, with emergency continency plans and with an international presence to monitor protection concerns for children;

- Girl children, especially those returning from the camps as young mothers, should receive adequate attention and assistance;
- Children in spontaneous foster care should be systematically identified and channeled into appropriate tracing efforts;

10. A **regional fund for children should be considered for the Great Lakes.** The problems children face in Rwanda are shared by children in Burundi, eastern Congo, northern Uganda and in the refugee camps of Tanzania. A regional initiative for children would bring needed attention to the problems and more coordinated planning and programming.

The initiative should support such things as:

- A program to transition children's centers into community centers (three-year support);
- Promotion of innovative tracing methods;
- Promotion of community-based monitoring programs and social welfare committees;
- Greater awareness of problems facing child-headed households and street children;
- Formal and non-formal education efforts;
- Support for adolescent girls;
- Impact evaluations of psychosocial interventions.

## Members of the Delegation

**Mary Diaz,** Executive Director, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children
**Beverlee Bruce,** Chair of the Board, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children
**Brigette de Lay,** technical advisor on refugee children
**Jurate Kazickas,** Board Member, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

## Acknowledgements

The Women's Commission would like to thank Brad Simon for his help in logistics and research; Hadidja Nyiransekuye, our interpreter; Heidi Wagner and Maha Muna, John Keys and others from the International Rescue Committee for support and assistance. We are also grateful to Soren Jessen Petersen, Tina Ghelli and others at UNHCR who helped to make our visit successful; Rebecca Dale at UNDP; Marie de la Soudiere and others at UNICEF; Armineh Arakelian, UNHCR Senior Regional Advisor for Refugee Women, Great Lakes Region; Dan Curran, independent consultant; and Marguerite Marty at Columbia University Law School for translation assistance.

Most of all, we wish to thank the many NGO staff, particularly the local women's NGOs and associations, and the individual Rwandan women who answered our questions and offered their opinions, advice and experiences.

## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ADFL | Democratic Alliance for the Liberation of Congo |
| CHH | Children-headed households |
| DRC | Democratic Republic of the Congo |
| ICRC | International Committee of the Red Cross |
| IRC | International Rescue Committee |
| MIGEFASO | Ministry of Gender, Family Affairs and Social Welfare |
| MIJEUMA | Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports |
| NGO | Nongovernmental organization |
| RPF | Rwandan Patriotic Front |
| SC-UK | Save the Children-UK |
| SC-US | Save the Children-US |
| SOC | Separated and orphaned children |
| UCC | University College Cork |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNIFEM | United Nations Development Fund for Women |

## Organizations with which the delegation met

Action Nord Sud
AVEOA
Bamporeze
Catholic Relief Services
Centre canadien d'Étude et de Coopération Internationale (CECI)
Centre des Jeunes GATENGA
Club Mamans Sportives
CONCERN
Duhozanye
Duterimbere
Food for the Hungry International
Foundation Tumurere
Gisimba
Hagaruka (Association pour la Défense des Droits de la Femme et de l'Enfant)
House of Joy
International Social Services
ICRC-Kigali
International Rescue Committee
Italian Cooperation
Lutheran World Federation
Médecins sans Frontières-Belgium
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Affairs (MIGEF ASO)
Ministry of Youth (MIJEUMA)
Pro Femmes
Red Barnet (Save the Children-Denmark)
Reseau des Femmes Oeuvrant pour le Développement Rural
Save the Children-UK
Save the Children-US
Sevota
United Nations Development Programme
UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)
University College of Cork, Child Studies Unit
United States Embassy
US Agency for International Development/Women in Transition
World Vision

## Sources

"Great Lakes: IRIN Special Feature-Unaccompanied Children," July 30, 1997
Savino, C & Williamson, J. "Rwanda Assessment: Displaced Children and Orphaned Fund" January 27-February 10, 1996
Williamson, J. "Draft Rwanda Assessment," August 1997
"Children in Difficult Circumstances (CDC): Policy and Strategies: A Government Document," 1996
"Promoting Community-Based Follow-up of Vulnerable Children: Report of the distribution of the results of the Kabusunzu seminar-workshop"
UNICEF Plan of Action CEDC/Child Protection 1997, UNICEF Kigali

## Endnotes

1. Many people say they were forced to flee at gunpoint and later forced to remain in the refugee camps.
2. "Shattered Lives: Sexual Violence During the Rwandan Genocide and Its Aftermath," Human Rights Watch/Africa, September 1996.
3. Republic of Rwanda: Socio-Demographic Survey 1996, Preliminary Report, July 1997.
4. Ibid, page 5.
5. UNICEF State of the World's Children, 1996.
6. Interview with Joe Comerford.
7. Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium Progress Review: Reproductive Health in Rwanda, July 1997.
8. Ibid.
9. Sectoral Policy, May 1997, Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Affairs.
10. U.S. Agency for International Development, Bureau for Humanitarian Response, Office of Transition Initiatives, Rwandan Transition Program Report.
11. Gitarama, Byumba, Umatara, Kibungo, Kigali Rural.
12. See 2.
13. Since the delegation's visit, UNHCR has set up new cooperation structures and mechanisms with governmental and nongovernmental partners to improve and better coordinate integration of gender perspectives in policies and activities. UNHCR Gender Focal Points have been assigned at central level and in each sub/field office, and MIGEFASO has appointed a Central Focal Point who works closely with UNHCR on the RWI and gender mainstreaming strategy. See UNHCR Comprehensive Report on RWI, January - December 1997.
14. UNICEF Project Plan of Action 1997, CEDC/Child Protection Programme, UNICEF-Rwanda.
15. Interview with Huguette Rutera, national program officer, Child Protection Unit, UNICEF-Kigali.
16. Interview with Huguette Rutera. See 15.
17. Although UNHCR has not yet officially recognized an internally displaced population, the prefet of Gisenyi recently requested 3,000 additional food rations from WFP to assist the recent influx.
18. IPS/Misa, September 2, 1997
19. The coordination team included the Rwandan Patriotic Front, UNICEF, UNHCR, ICRC and Save the Children-UK.
20. MINITRASO policy document, March 1996.
21. ibid.
22. Williamson, J. & Savino, C. "Rwanda Assessment: Displaced Children and Orphans Fund," January 27-

February 10, 1996. For more information on the impact of institutionalization on children, refer to David Tolfree, "Roofs and Roots: The Care of Separated Children in the Developing World," Save the Children-UK.
23. Estimates of the number of children living in centers who are "socioeconomic" cases range from 30 to 80 percent.
24. Average cost per child in centers is calculated from MIGEFASO document on centers.
25. Family reunification includes four steps: 1) Identification of a SOC; 2) Documentation of important information about the child and the circumstances of separation; 3) Tracing by a number of different methods; 4) Reunification with a family member.
26. In early 1997, MINITRASO, the ministry formerly responsible for social welfare was closed. MIGEFASO is now the ministry responsible for this sector.
27. Interview with child protection staff, UNICEF-Kigali and MIGEFASO representatives.
28. Interview with several international and local NGO workers.
29. MIGEFASO's "Regulation for centers caring for separated children" has not yet been adopted as law.
30. Interview with University of Cork researcher.
31. At the time of the delegation visit, a census on center population was being conducted. Preliminary findings were not available.
32. In every center, whether classified as a "transit" center for returnee children or a longer-term residential care facility, there is a percentage of children who have been there for an extended period of time. These children are known as the residual case load. Although national statistics show a steady decline in the overall numbers of children in centers, they do not reflect the percentage of children who have remained in centers for more than one year. In the IRC-sponsored Fred Rwigema Center, for example, although the number recorded in the center showed a steady decline in the numbers of children, 78 children had been in the center since early 1995.
33. Interview with MIGEFASO.
34. International Social Services document "Family and Community Integration for Rwandan Orphans and Separated Children: One Child, One Family Program."
35. Interview with UNICEF and four center directors.
36. Interview with MIGEFASO.
37. Lori Calvo, the head of UNICEF's Child Protection Unit, reported that UNICEF, in collaboration with UNHCR, plans to support seven centers. This support is primarily for centers with "inconnus."
38. Many international workers question the validity of the current estimate.
39. Current HIV incidence is 20-30 percent urban, 3-9 percent rural (Williamson, J. Rwanda Assessment: Displaced Children and Orphans Fund, August 1997/Draft).
40. Interview with children-headed households in Byumba Prefecture, "No Home Without Foundation: A Portrait of Child-headed Households in Rwanda," Cohen and Hendler, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, December 1997.
41. Interview with Huguette Rutera. See 16.
42. Interview with children-headed households in Byumba Prefecture. See 43.
43. This is an estimated percentage based on the informal study conducted by Hendler and Cohen and rough estimates by UNICEF. This estimate may not include small local initiatives.
44. "No Home Without Foundation." See 43.
45. UNICEF is planning to conduct a study in the upcoming months.
46. Interview with Jean Leiby, Program Coordinator, Action Nord Sud.
47. UNICEF Plan of Action 1997.
48. "Enquête sur les problèmes d'integration sociale des jeunes en situation difficile dans la ville de Kigali," conducted by MIJEUMA in 1996.
49. Only preliminary results of the study were available.
50. This team is made up of representatives from MIJEUMA, UNICEF, UNDP, Italian Cooperation and the University of Cork.
51. Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, "Socio-Demographic Survey 1996," July, 1997.
52. Government officials, service providers and parents reported to the delegation that it cost on average $15 a year per child for primary school and $250 a year per child for secondary school.
53. Saalfeld, M. "An Assessment of Current and Potential Forms of Parental Partucipation in Rwandan Schools," MA Education, Columbia University.
54. ibid.
55. Aguilar, P. & Richmond, M. ,"Emergency Educational Response in the Rwandan Crisis."
56. Interview with Mark Saalfeld, former consultant to UNICEF-Kigali Education Section.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE